

EDITED BY GLORIA MOURE

VITO ACCONCI

## 20\_21 Collection directed by Gloria Moure

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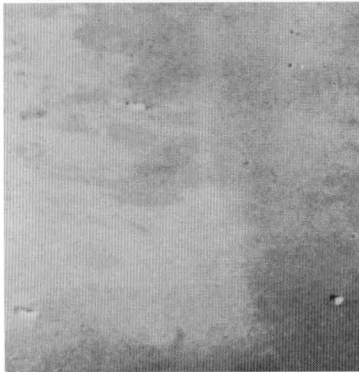
Frontier tensions

If any one word is capable of capturing the generic character of Vito Acconci's work, that word is *expansion*. This is something worth remarking because most of the published studies of Acconci and his work tend to be comfortably correlative and apparently untroubled by major fractures in the theoretical aspects, which in effect maintain a solid coherence and are applied to ever more complex spatial settings. In the light of this, both diachronic and synchronic analyses would appear to be viable methods. Nevertheless, a tidily linear approach, livened up here and there with the occasional innovative leap, would be neither just nor accurate. Rather, the evolution of Acconci's career asks to be addressed in terms of frontier and fringe or margin, in the sense that his action, at once inquisitorial and poetic, continually tests out the possible configurative limits which tend to demarcate it. Those limits are of an evidently epistemological and cultural character, but often also have a clear projection in images and material. Hence my choice of the word *expansion* as *leitmotiv*.

This characteristic of expansion serves, in addition, to get away from the counter-cultural tag that is habitually attached to the work of Acconci and many of his peers, far too obvious and conventional in content, and transform it into an attribute of much greater potency than the mere rebellion of the rock generation, to which the exclusivity of the contemporary counter-culture tends so trivially to adhere. What is more, that attribute raises itself above the ideological debate and establishes its place in the — wider — realm of aesthetics. I am referring here to the tension between artistic activity and power (in whatever form this is expressed) which impregnates many of his works and, of course, the body of his work as a whole.

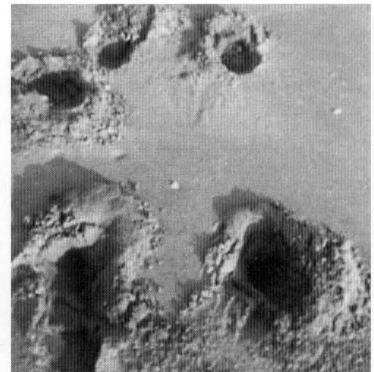
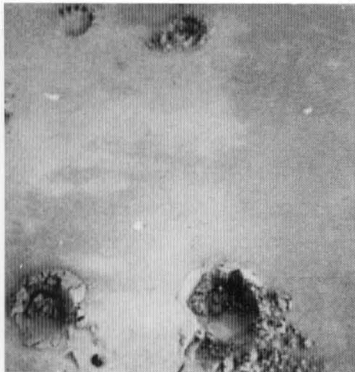
The marginal and frontier quality of the creative phenomenon is no novelty to Acconci's generation, in that this was something which had already amply manifested itself in the free spirits of the historic avant-garde, from the seminal impulses of Romanticism on. But in the mid sixties that centrifugal force reasserted itself with unforeseen energy from the very

core of the modernity. It was not so much a matter of a smashing of moulds as of the exorcizing of an isolation or, more precisely, an alienation of artistic activity and its products in relation to its most immediate environment, brought about by the already corporatized avant-garde itself and its critical spokespersons, both of which had been as good as swallowed up by a market ever hungrier for stereotyped novelties. It was not, then, a transcending of frontiers, but the abomination of an absurd self-censorship, which existed in order to be liquidated and duly disappeared as a result of the unbearable pressure it exercised. Once the imaginary barriers had been removed, the extension of the creative sphere was not posited in terms of the overthrow of an old and absolute regime, but as an expansion on the basis of the idea of interaction, with the sudden disappearance of the barriers between the creator, the thing created and the spatial support where the two were identified. The introspective purity of the most pristine avant-garde thus found itself overtaken by the daring implicit in the invasion of other genres. And, in some way, the problematics of the subject-object binomial, if not entirely discountenanced, now began to be treated in a way that was more harmonious and consistent and, of course, not antagonistic. This significant expansion of the configurative universe was accompanied by a rejection of the reductive emphasis which for years had stubbornly striven to isolate the plastic and visual from the linguistic. It was as if the artists, disillusioned by their failure to eradicate everything, suddenly realized that it was in the very polysemous quality of the signs attached to the material, to the form and to the image that the genuine and creatively useful abstraction consisted. This meant embracing language instead of repudiating it. These two things together, the interaction without limits and the identification of the language with the plasticity and the visibility of the objects, were the trigger and the catalyst of a configurative revolution of vast proportions, out of which there emerged new tensions and counterpoints. The cognitive aspect of the artistic, without denying the pursuit of the absolute, and, in consequence, the experimental character of non-utilitarian — that is to say, poetic — creation prevailed as the favoured creative approach. The very bodies and behaviour of both artists and spectators came to be the habitual protagonists of the interactive experience, while the processes of perception themselves were the object of an intense poeticizing. Nothing, from the most elementary to the most complex, could escape the configurative eagerness of the creative artists; materiality and virtuality were blended in the voracious creative sump, as were the strictly physical and the linguistic.



*Push-Ups*, 1969

In this overall expansive and interactive context, with the artists speculating and poeticizing on its diffuse and shifting frontiers, the poetic critique of culture was to become an essential element, with ever more frequent incursions into the realm of the political, seen as embracing not only the formally and conventionally political — indeed this more concrete part would perhaps be the less significant — but all of that space subject to opinion and socially shared. In this respect, what became evident in the late sixties is that that political and eminently dialectical space was parallel to and practically coincident with the poetic, as well as being ubiquitous and having diffuse frontiers. Another aspect of great importance also became evident: the political and the poetic constituted the creative facet of the human being and as such were part of the human condition. The difference between artists and those who were not artists was that the former dedicated all of their activity to this enthralling but fearsome territory, irrespective of whether their actions and the objects produced by



these were valued or not by the arbiters of the art market. The plastic and visual artist, by the very nature of his or her creative approach, is always on the edge of the inexpressible and in fact seeks to configure it: indeed, the artist operates in the signic soup of forms and materials, but more in the sense of transgressing the last linguistic bastions or perhaps, more precisely, playing with these, attempting in this way to move in the Foucauldian outside, where silence and the failure to speak are due to incapacity and not to repression. But it is precisely on that borderline

where — given that language is power and power is, first and foremost, language — power reveals its timidities and fragilities. Hence the brushes that Acconci and his generation have always tended to have with the dominant discourse in the community in which they live. In short, where I want to go with this whole body of argument is to the realization that the conflictive and transgressive strand which can be seen in the course pursued by Acconci and his contemporaries is not specific but generic, however concrete the power of the market and the mediatic *diktat* of the New York clique were and are. They simply expanded the configurative domain, interacting and abandoning the old reductionisms. They thus gave unto art that which was art's, since the facts demonstrated that the human being was at once a political and a poetic entity, and it is in this that both our essence and the relations we establish with our environment consist.

This state of things involved a change, at once qualitative and quantitative, in the ways of making art and implied not only a new relationship between the plastic and visual arts and other disciplines, but also a repositing and revising of certain very basic artistic questions. That is why the creative atmosphere of the years bridging the two decades, the sixties and the seventies, was one of absolute regeneration and experimentation. In moving from the concept of remote, distanced configuration to that of the interactive, the tension between the private and the public made itself patent, exacerbated, what is more, by the highlighting of the process-centred aspects of both creation and perception, and by the absorbing as configurative elements of bodies, actions and behaviours. Consequently, the obviousness of the appearance of many performances was mistaken for blatant leg-pulling and the testing of the audience's reaction for the mere provocation of the typical bourgeois *enfant terrible*. Without a doubt, the direct involvement of the creators in the performances also had to do with an almost pornographic attempt at appropriating power with regard to the commercial art circuit, but it seems to me, as I remarked above in relation to the political aspects, that this was very far from being the essential issue. There were very few in those years who addressed the problematic of privacy more nakedly than Acconci did.

As may well be supposed, and although up until now I have adduced sufficient causes intrinsic to artistic modernity itself to account on their own for the linguistic and interactive explosion of the visual and plastic arts around 1970, the general intellectual ferment in both the humanities and the sciences had been evolving in the same direction.

As far as philosophy is concerned, thanks to the — wrongly so-called — irrationalist or pessimist philosophers and their influences the idea of substance, one of the central concepts of metaphysics, was disappearing, or was only accepted as undifferentiated energy (coinciding here with the Oriental philosophies), so that the individualized being was only intelligible as an interactive becoming and, in consequence, the concept of interaction was clearly taking the place of that of substance. At the same time, on the basis of his or her consciousness and memory the human being configured a “self” which, linked to the body psychosomatically (in other words, not linguistically) constituted a unit of consciousness. That unit recognized itself and related to its environment by means of language, which made reflection possible, and of the body, which made measurement possible. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein had already suggested the language scarcely has a truth content, and Gödel that a system could not explain itself to itself from its own interior, so that most of the things of interest to humanity could not be said without first accepting their absolute contingency and precariousness. In consequence, any conception of the world, however useful it might be, suffered from the same fragility. In this state of things, it could be established that we human beings had no alternative but continually to reconfigure our existence, in the light of its dialectical essence. To put it another way, it was a matter of unceasingly re-describing life, whether it be in terms of the games of language (Wittgenstein), the construction of grammars (Chomsky) or the elaboration of new metaphors (Rorty).

But it was necessary to go still deeper and respond to the key question: what anchorage did humans possess with which successfully to confront the dialectical reality that enveloped everything? Or more precisely, where were we to ground our criteria of re-description; in that very contingency which almost epically dramatized our lives or in the typically human transcendental (metaphysical) attributes? Evidently in the latter, as Schopenhauer clearly affirmed in his day, and Karl Popper after him. In essence, there were three eminently human attributes in the non-utilitarian sense; in other words, three attributes not irremediably bound up with the pure desire for survival: to understand the world, to take part in the process of creating it and to do good, although certainly animals and in particular the higher mammals could surprise us at times with capacities similar to ours in all three areas. However many instinctive roots we might have in common with other species, the great difference lay in motivation and in reflection. These two things were possible by virtue of language, which at the same time made possible falsifiability and



*Digging Piece, 1970*



the discovery of errors, without life consisting in that. Having thus risen above the cruel component of survival, it was our emotional and social nature which would guide the scale of metaphysical values with which dialectical reality was to be configured. So, then, and in spite of those who sought to reduce philosophy to pure linguistic logic, and despite the obsolescence of the concept of substance, the dialectical universe expanded and the pertinence of a metaphysical treatment of it was established anew. In that context, and in perfect parallel with what took place in art, the profile of a basically political and poetic consciousness of the "I" manifested itself with the greatest clarity.

As far as science is concerned, here too everything was reconciled, in that the concepts of uncertainty and of interaction predominated over all others, while the purely material characteristics ceded sovereignty to the contents and exchange of information. In effect, in an uncertain, random world, with a tendency to complexity and steeped in probability, continual entropic explosions transferred information and made locally possible the advent of creation, by means of the genesis of objects endowed with a superior level of order. In that irregular and scarcely predictable process there were many possible histories (among them that of every individual being), made concrete in an irreversible and unfathomable succession of interdependencies. Beings, their languages, their spirits and their Utopias were not outside of that bubbling non-determinist soup but trapped inside of it. And so, as had happened on a few previous occasions in our culture, philosophy, art and science formed a solid corpus in terms of their cohesion and coherence, but one by no means static in terms of its internal structure of interrelations.

It would appear, then, that the apparently conflictive stance with regard to social and political conventionalisms which Acconci's work and trajectory evidence through the filter of aesthetics is not a matter of any specific intentions with respect to more or less established and concrete cultural situations imposed by a certain *status quo*, but the reflection of an overall creative approach very much in tune with the spirit of the times; an approach which is, indeed, consistent with those interactive, expansive and frontier critical processes on the basis of which the artistic phenomenon unfailingly defines itself, if it is to maintain its authenticity at all times. Similarly, a second order of tensions is produced when Acconci confronts the private with the collective. This, too, is inevitable and is a consequence of the generic and global processes of creativity to which I have just been referring. A reading which highlights only the

provocative component of that already secular counterpoint in the most contemporary art is simply poor and inadequate. But there is still, on the general level, another binary tension which seems to me to be just as significant as the two I have mentioned, and equally omnipresent. I am referring to the all but collision-free coexistence of the European and the North American cultural discourses, regarding as a fundamental characteristic of the former a persistently sceptical attitude towards sensory perceptions; which leads inevitably to the acceptance of a conscious "I" which relates to objects and to the consideration of language as a vehicle which validates this contact. In North America, in contrast, there often prevails a somewhat ingenuous empiricism which will submit only to the supposed evidence of the facts and, when it finds itself in difficulties, converts the vehicles of relationship with objects into objects in their turn or identifies them with the subject in order to side-step the problem more or less successfully. In this respect it is highly illuminating to analyse the way that the influences of the Bauhaus, of Fauvism, of Surrealism, of Neoplasticism and so on were transformed during the post-war period into genuine empiricist fundamentalisms such as the "all-over" and the "minimal" styles, which look for either the literal valuation (without metaphors) of the configurative elements, or the identification without benevolent loopholes of idea, perception and material object. We find a clear example of this in the efforts of the philosopher Rorty to appropriate eclectically the irony of the turn-of-the-century avant-garde (e.g. Jarry, Roussel, Brisset, Duchamp, etc.) and the linguistic contingency exposed to view by Wittgenstein, before going on to replace the metaphysical self with language itself and invoke the necessary transcendental values on the basis of modern literature, which seems to me to be an untenable manoeuvre, bearing in mind that the "inexpressible" zone is the original ferment of artistic configuration and the discoveries of science, although it has to be acknowledged that language auto-induces creativity by means of its structures and of course, through the adherences with which it "nominates" objects.

In any case, if there is any place in the United States where the two discourses collide and collude, it is New York, whose universality is beyond doubt. Acconci, for me a New York archetype, is intensely involved in that much more fruitful than fatal cross-fertilization, but is and presents himself as being absolutely American, as can be seen from the lightness of his historicist baggage and his peculiar brand of radicalism, with its absence of *a priori*s of any kind. That discursive tension is common to many of his generation, to the extent that their work is frequently more

widely recognized and better known in Europe than in the United States. However, Acconci's particular expansive testing-out, directed as it is towards creative interaction, has solidly underpinned his role for years; and this, combined with his lyrical origins, which have sought from the outset the physical space and the corporeity of the word like an early Stoic, come together in a continual re-addressing and emphasizing of the issue of the distance between the creator and the created, and of that other distance between the creator and his configurative instruments. I believe that his philosophical position is neither ingenuously rationalist nor simply empiricist, but that he draws, in effect, on both currents, which have always seemed to me to be not so very remote from one another. One thing is clear, however. Acconci tends never to confound terms when they are essential, neither from error nor from opportunism, which is probably why he avoids complex premisses.

#### Affirmations, demarcations and contacts

The interactive and linguistic explosion of art was a happy coincidence for Acconci's creative yearnings, in that his creative energy came not from the realm of the visual or plastic, but from the less literary and more autonomous side of poetry. The leap between genres was no doubt relatively easy, once the technical and practical limits of the recitals had been achieved, in that it was greatly facilitated by the objective alliance between different creative ferments then being inexorably forged.

A highly gifted student within a familiar setting, whose talent often manifested itself in striking alliterations and startling poetic occurrences, he was in considerable doubt about which direction to take academically, although the doors of the universities were opened wide to his lyrical and literary abilities. The apparent existential absurd was perhaps his primary orientation (probably through the influence of Samuel Beckett), but sufficiently offset by the influence of those avant-garde authors of the past and present, whose approach to language was especially objective and verbalizing, in the sense of separating themselves directly or indirectly from the anchor of meanings (Ezra Pound, for example). It was hardly surprising, then, that Acconci should have been regarded as a decidedly original, not to say odd, student in the fairly conventional literary circles in which he moved at the University of Iowa. An active reciter in alternative venues and get-togethers, he also edited a literary

review which linked the newer writers and movements with the great tradition, he had just attained the maximum lyrical radicalism when he undertook a complete shift towards the visual, which was really more an inflection than a break.

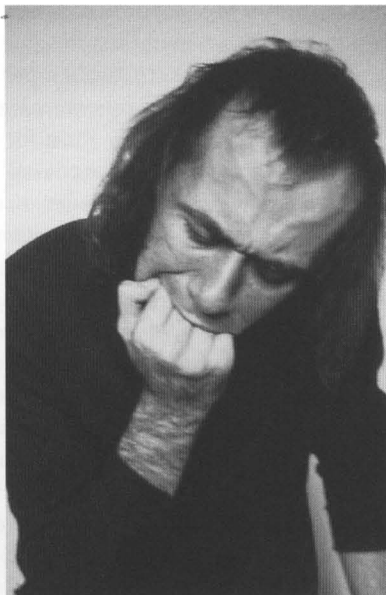
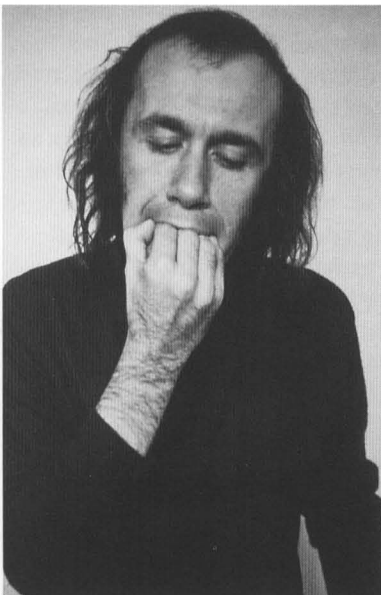
In fact, his poems were already aggressively self-referential, as well as tending to scale their language physically and temporally, since, in Acconci's words, they were more concerned with "filling a space" than with "revealing a meaning". At times his verse not only described actions verbally, but the tempo of the delivery set out to match that of the action being expressed; at others, in a conscious display of minimalism (as the author himself acknowledges), the description was reduced to the syntax itself. Finally, there were other occasions when, perhaps fondly recalling earlier inclinations, the mix of syntactical and semantic games obscured the potential transcendence of the words and emphasized, in contrast, their structural position.

Then, just as the fatigue of the avant-garde broke through the confines of objectualization in art (both physically and conceptually), Acconci set out to expand and materialize his poetry, moving beyond the limits of the written page and plunging into another genre, the visual, at that moment in total explosion. To say that this was a move from the word to the body, in the same way that the page was transformed into an open or interior space, seems to me to be an inadequate and excessively elementary reading; first, because it establishes an identity between subject and language to which the artist does not subscribe, and, second, because such an identity hardly serves to explain the majority of the early "actions" or, indeed, Acconci's career as a whole with the necessary rigour.

From the outset Acconci conceptualizes the page as "thing" and as "container" which the words occupy, but at the same time he holds that those words are the "accessories of movement". The essential question is how that movement changes vehicle and goes from saying itself to configuring itself. It is the speaker who introduces himself into the landscape and not the language made flesh. The proof is that, above all in the first phases of the performances, the artist's relationship with the environment is practically a-linguistic and strictly physical. Then, when language returns, it does so once again as accessory, but now with other ends, in that it superposes itself on the physical evidence, critically merging with it, in order to extend the process of creation to the audience and emphasize the experimental character of the shared expression. In any

case, the change of creative sphere was inevitable, because, as Acconci himself has acknowledged, his habitual creative territory had simply "slipped out from beneath his feet". In relation to this he recognizes that in his last poetry recitals the "reading of the page" had been abandoned in favour of a "reading of the room" where it took place.

The process of expansion towards the environment which Acconci then commenced was based on the principle of interactivity, which was ultimately to lead him to his well-known urbanistic interventions, but initially he concentrated on issues of self-identification and of availability. That environment was a complex and moving landscape whose nature was at once material and immaterial, in that its essence included both cultural and sociological aspects. This meant that any interaction had to be scaled in terms of time, space and movement, as far as the strictly physical aspect was concerned, as well as taking into account the dialectics of behaviours. These two requisites implied in their turn the relevance of certain supports (film, video, photography). On the other



*Hand & Mouth, 1970*

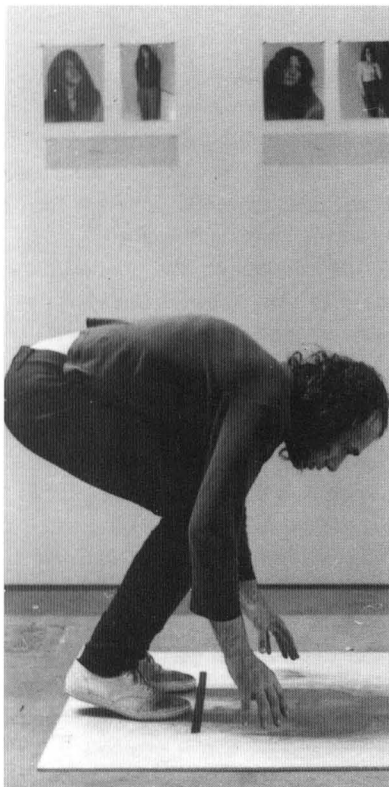
hand, given that the creator was included in the landscape which he helped to configure, and given, too, the iconographic potency and plurality of that landscape, it was vitally important to avoid any "overacting" in the gestures, so as not to fall into unnecessary and inappropriate redundancy or, even worse, theatricality.

But there were a further two key considerations which served to reinforce the need for an economy and simplicity of expressive means bordering even on raw brutality. In the first place, we should recall that the distancing produced by the self-contemplative objectuality of the work of art was the motive for the declared absorption of the environment. This extension had, in addition, been catalysed by the recognition of the fragility and contingency of language and all its discursive derivations. This state of things seemed at first sight to favour the blossoming of creativity, but by this time the dictatorship of the mass communications media had already established its sophisticated dominion, giving rise to a tragic paradox, in that the new mythology of the media had come in effect to replace the old axioms, virtualizing reality and alienating its consumers from the experience of life. Without a doubt, this situation was much more evident in the young, open and opulent society of North America than in traditionalist and historicist Europe. To interact creatively with the environment meant to fight against that alienation after having overcome its predecessor or, more precisely, to do the two things at once. This posited a Heideggerian situation *par excellence*, defined by what was most "to hand" and governed by extensive, deep-seated and effective social codes which left very little room for individual authenticity. There was no alternative but to practice a critical interference directed at the roots of the omnipotent and omnipresent discourse, but without giving way to grandiloquence or rhetoric, exploiting the small loopholes in the banal and looking for domino effects, at least as far as the diffusion of information was concerned. The fortunate lightness of the academic load and of socio-cultural conventionalisms in North America gave a clear advantage to the US artists when it came to undertaking iconoclastic ventures, which apparently set out to insult the intelligence of the audience, although in fact this was very far from being the case. Thanks to his lyrical background, Acconci enjoyed a double advantage, in that he did not have to shake off any kind of contamination in the form of art education, coming as he did from a different field from many of his fellow-travellers; to the contrary, all he had to do was pursue the path he had started out on, merely introducing a slight and perfectly logical inflection in his course.

In the second place there was the context of minimal expression which the purism of a reductive abstraction had encouraged many North American artists to adopt in the sixties; artists who were at the same time anxious to dissociate themselves from what they regarded as the reprehensible tendency of the European tradition to embrace existential content (something which Abstract Expressionism had not only not done, but had in fact magnified that tendency). At one extreme there was Conceptual Art, with its unadorned manifestations of more or less pre-configurative ideas or assertions. At the other there was Minimalism, with its simple structures fashioned from industrial materials, in pursuit of a kind of aesthetic anaesthetic less poetic than the Duchampian. Both of these tendencies sought to destroy formal and objectual singularity, and to this end frequently made use of repetition. As we have already noted, Acconci regards himself as having been influenced by this anti-expressionist panorama, even in the days when he was still reading his poems to an audience.

Performance, known in its more restricted form as Body Art, was to resolve once and for all the old and dramatic dichotomy between subject and object. This probably explains why it fitted in so readily as a further development on the "drippings" of Jackson Pollock (in themselves pristine metaphors of the spatially open work and the pure gesture), although such a correlative connection required that every singularity and every expressivity should first be eliminated, in addition making the implicit time and movement absolutely actual. With regard to this, Acconci considers that the body became the "point of departure and arrival". The fact that in it were subsumed the solipsistic microcosm and the macrocosm that surrounded and contained it explains why certain works had a markedly introspective and autonomous character, without ceasing to be interactions, while others were quite the opposite; in other words, they required communication with the audience to complete them. In any case, even in those more subjective and self-sufficient works there was not a trace of emotionally projected inner experience. This was radically so because, while the body was a psychosomatic unit of consciousness, its existential reason was seen as phenomenological and not substantial, so that it was treated as a purely physiological entity with no greater depth. Thus gestures and movements were catalogued as acts of measurement, of discovery and of learning. Only in so far as account was taken of its relations with the "outside" — in other words, with the environment — was it possible to speak of concepts, of judgements and of cognitive articulations. All of this tied in perfectly with the Anglo-Saxon tradition of behaviourist psychology.

Following the evolution of Acconci's thought, we find the recognition that the artist is himself a sign, producer of other signs, but at the same time there can be no doubt that a performance is intrinsically an operation of learning which develops "by means of space" and not "in space" (space is an element of interaction and not a mere container). That performance presupposes a psychic and physical fatigue and a gradual generation of information, which is recycled in the process. In its genesis, then, a performance does not necessarily have to be directed towards an observer and can thus be a strictly private act, to the extent of including unconscious movements. But in this latter instance the performance ends up being projected, either directly or indirectly, towards the public in some way. This means accepting the fact of other people's interference and, in consequence, adding to the effort the idea of vulnerability involved in the process of "laying bare".

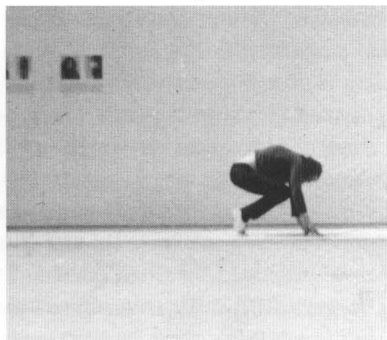


*Broadjump, 1971*

I have already remarked that the dynamic dimensionality of the performances and the definition of these in the realm of behaviours conditioned the crudeness and simplicity of the configurations, but I also noted that this implied the use of certain supports rather than others. In effect, Acconci utilizes film, video and photographs not in any banal way but for specific purposes. We shall go on to look at the way he symbolically integrates the photographic camera into the configuration of the work and then shows the photographs in a film-like (sequential) form. It is precisely the photographic works which most clearly reveal his slow and gradual process of expansive testing-out on the basis of his most naked and helpless ego. To the observer of the works and the reader of this book this might seem an unnecessary task, but it is less so if instead of thinking in terms of concepts we move over to the plane of experience. We should never forget that a visual artist is neither a critic nor a teacher, so that his or her creative approach develops in material terms, although it might be said metaphorically that they think with their eyes and fingers. Acconci used photography as long as the vision was his main concern but, as he himself says, he gave it up "in order to learn to touch". In any case, he doubts that he "could have spared himself this arduous toil". In my opinion, the effort was not in vain, in that it was a matter of elaborating an absolutely new kind of configuration, in a context that did not exist before, painstakingly executing all of the artistically necessary steps, without discursive *a priori*s of any kind. Acconci's insistence on specifying in detail the phase of interaction which corresponds to every group of illustrations in this book shows just how far the theoretical focus of the "step by step" approach is of significance to him.



Between film and video, there seems to be a clear preference for the latter system of reproduction, the reason for this being more aesthetic than operative, because video, given its technical characteristics, tied in very effectively with the premisses of testing-out and the cession of availability which Acconci's performances implied. Invoking once again his theoretical reflections on the question, it is easy to note the preference in more detail: film is by definition a "closed region" and the spectator acts as a "spy" infiltrated into it, although one permitted the option of passivity or intellectual or emotional indifference. There is no communion with the artist because this is in fact impossible. There is something unhealthy, anonymous and anomalous about the discovery of privacy in these circumstances. It might also be said that in spite of sound, film is as an invitation to silence. In contrast, video seemed to have been invented in order to capture learning processes configured on the basis of insistence and continuity, had the typical feature of the unfinished work, and proved to be an ideal mechanism for carrying out trial and error tests. Whereas film expands and is in itself landscape, video is clearly in the interior of that landscape. The direct image is, nevertheless, imperfect and grainy in comparison to that of film, so that sound is absolutely essential. With regard to this, Acconci considers that the monitor is probably more important as a "sound box" than as a projector of images. Finally and perhaps even more essentially, video practically imposes a dialectics of understanding, of complicity or even of aggression between the exposed privacy of the artist on the one hand and the attitude of the audience on the other, in that it reduces distances to that practically intimate space in which indifference is no longer possible, in addition to the redundancy



represented in this respect by the material presence of one or more video monitors along the trajectory of perception followed by the observer, half way between the focusing of attention and nuisance.

Most of the works which Acconci produced during the 69-70 period have a character of self-identification and of self-localization in the public space, or more precisely of affirmation and demarcation in the "outside" of privacy. The works reveal without a trace of ambiguity either Acconci's wary occupation of the space as subject — whether this be purely physical space or that other space defined by political and sociological roles — or the denotation of his body as producer of marks (object), which creates its own expansive space. In both situations Acconci "acted on himself", but he prefers to differentiate them and define the former as "the body in space" and the latter as "the space of the body". The series of strictly photographic experiences which he undertook in the course of 1969 have not the slightest connection with illusionist virtuosity, not even with a minimum of dexterity in the framing. The camera becomes simply another retina, generally placed at a certain distance from the eyes and without any compensation of its position in relation to the movements of the body. The photographs correspond to the singular moments of the particular performance and tend to be presented in the form of a sequence. In *12 pictures*, for example, they simply capture an audience which remains in darkness, while every step taken by the artist produces a pressure on the shutter and the corresponding flash. In other cases, such as *Toe-Touch* or *Throw*, they illustrate the movement of the body as it carries out a bending or throwing exercise; the panoramic view varies in consequence and any sensation of an integrated and stable landscape is neutralized by the change in focus. In reality, these images are a kind of sculpture in negative; they dynamically capture what lies outside of their borders, dispensing with the tactile characteristic and absorbing an atmosphere of elementary learning, almost without establishing any two-way contact with the public. That same year Acconci carried out a performance in some ways similar to the experience of *12 pictures*, which consisted in observing one by one, in silence, the members of an audience; a performance which in effect marked a certain advance in the process of interaction, albeit an incipient one (which probably explains the title, *performance test*). Envisaged as a piece of theatre by the organizers, in practice it is more like a manifestation of the artist-sign than a monologue without words, in the manner of John Cage's silences, as it were. This critical humanism (as I would describe it) based on interference with other bodies and with a total absence of language was

repeated with the following of individuals in the street (*Following Piece*, 1969) or in a museum (*Proximity Piece*, 1970), again in absolute silence. In parallel with these pieces, Acconci created a number of works in which the process of learning itself, in the form of verbal stammering and a self-induced concatenation of movements, is the principal motive. Thus, in *Learning Piece* (1970) the lines of a well-known song are recited, the extension progressively repeated and extending to complete the song, while in *Second Hand* (1970) Acconci mimics on a canvas in the half-light of an electric bulb the movements of the second-hand of a wall clock. Nevertheless, as I said before, even as it maintains a strongly self-reflective tendency, Acconci's work qualitatively extends the dimensionality of the space of interaction beyond physical metrics in order to embrace the social sphere that will accommodate its public projection. This, however, involves a significant inversion in the configurative approach utilized up until then, because the works I have referred to so far seem to pursue a kind of exclusion principle (similar to that utilized in theoretical physics) which requires that in the space of interaction there should be a single body or object at each point. It is precisely this that led me to comment above on the similarity with the dynamic sculptures in negative (by exclusion), in that Acconci sets out in them to occupy a territory and from there to test out its boundaries. Hence, too, the presence of the term demarcation in the title of this section. In effect, the extension to the social frame causes Acconci to transform exclusion into inclusion and decide to share spaces with the observers, choosing for that purpose those spaces that are habitual nodes of communication between the artist (or more precisely, between the artist's works) and the public. The intimate and interactive nature of his configurations endowed those contacts with an anti-conventional tone within the traditional context of the circuit of distribution of art and culture, but there was nothing destructive or dismissive in them, merely the ironic identification of an inappropriateness by no means easy to resolve. Thus, in *Room Piece*, *35 Approaches* and *Service Area*, all of which date from 1970, Acconci shared the exhibition space of galleries and museums with the visitors, but not with their presence, in that he utilized those places only as zones of communicative exchange. There he proceeded to show his privacy objectually, by means of personal letters which included small samples of his body (hair, etc.) and in which he anxiously calls for attention; moving his domestic effects from his apartment to a gallery and using them as and when necessary (actually going to get them) or establishing his "care of" poste restante in a museum. At any rate, Acconci did not embark on an open and decided relationship with the audience until he had first

configuratively covered the outstanding third component in his self-reflective quest, that of his own body itself as signic space, right in the interstice between inclusion and exclusion. With it, he arrived at a complete and "closed system" which embraced all the aesthetic dimensions of his privacy, then on the point of passing beyond the frontier of his availability. In this way he subjectivized the endemic objectualization of art without destroying it, while at the same time manifesting a partisan appropriation of artistic power in an inescapable way (although I am not sure that this was entirely intentional). The performances to which I am referring were carried out between 1970-1971, most of them recorded on film, and constitute a kind of synthetic compilation of the whole of that first phase, which we might describe as one of self-configuration (of "ego" with itself, to use his terms with due precision). Maximum privacy, transvestism and play underpin *Trappings* and *Conversions I, II and III*, all from 1971; crude measurement with a certain nuance of spatial dominion is the basis of *Passes* (1971); the pictogram of the body is the foundation



*Applications*, 1970



for *Rubbing Piece*, *Trademarks* and *Soap and Eyes*, and the disorientation, helplessness and vulnerability are exacerbated in *Blindfolded Catching* (1970). The metonymic content of these performances is extremely intense. At the same time, in these later performances the artist not only occupies a place, but generates a kind of spatial aura which expands around him, aesthetically activating his surroundings, exactly as an inanimate sculpture would do. But in that aesthetic activation there are plastic concretions of categories which are in general virtual and only described with more or less felicity by language and its projections in film or drama, as in the case of learning, adaptation, defencelessness, availability or self-control. Having "found himself" in the immense,

complex, new space, he could now plunge into the dialectics of the behaviours as a proactive entity. The process had been a particularly meticulous one, but the premiss of interactivity had required Acconci to see himself, as an artist and as an individual, as an agent of behaviour and not as someone alien to the vital landscape who was engaged in describing and redescribing the behaviours from an external and distanced position.

The inclusion of the dialectics of behaviours as a key configurative element, the phenomenological conception of being, in the sense of a being constructed by its interactive becoming, and the linguistic character which necessarily governed that interactivity, meant taking into account the discoveries of experimental psychology when it came to positing specific interactions. In fact, the sense of a learning process communicated by the performances which we described above had now assumed that cultured component. At the same time, certain notebooks published by the galleries, and indeed the jargon used by Acconci himself in his statements, bear witness to the specific influence of the avant-garde literature on the subject (which in any case, naturally enough, was an integral part of the spirit of the times). Kate Linker has already dealt with this point in detail in her lucid monograph study. According to Linker, Kurt Levin would have been a primary reference in this respect. Levin's focus was clearly holistic and affirmed that no behaviour (individual or collective) could have meaning in isolation, since it could only derive its genuine meaning from the socio-spatial context in which it was produced. Of the various manifestations of interdependence to which Levin referred, it seems to have been the so-called "power field" which made the greatest impression on Acconci. This concept suggests that one "area" of behaviour can superimpose itself on another (absorbing it concentrically) through a process of influence based on the incitement, tension and the subsequent response. In effect, the radical manner in which Acconci manifested his availability — laying bare his privacy by way of language, signs and gestures, stripping down each situation to the limit, and always with the counterpoint of his own vulnerability — tied in perfectly with that type of strategy. The tactic of tension was, like the learning process we have just noted, already in some way present in a good number of the works we have considered so far. I want to insist, however, on the fact that in these it was not as yet contact and communication but the delimitation of the subject of the behaviour that was the primary objective. It is only later that the two-way relationship comes to be explicitly pursued by the artist. To look more deeply into this

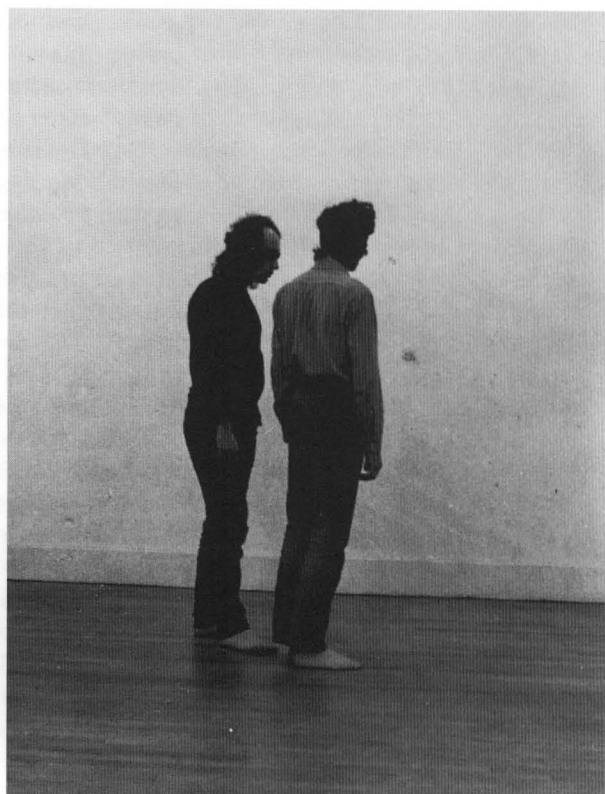
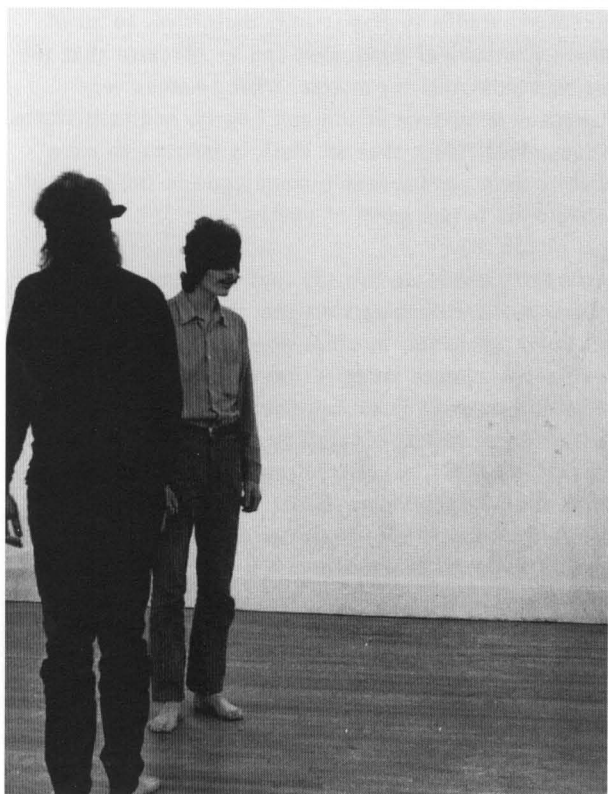
issue, it should be said that it can hardly be a coincidence that the use of video becomes a general feature of Acconci's work from this time, bearing in mind the special characteristics of this medium, as a means of exorcising the passivity and indifference of the observer.

In this new phase Acconci applied his habitual restraint and rigour, and just as the foregoing works had been conceived in two clearly differentiated blocks (the body in space and the space of the body), he now established a further clear separation between the body actions (*Body with Body*) and the personal actions (*Person-to-Person*). The works in the first of these groups date for the most part from 1971, and illustrate situations of domination (and subordination), but in a concentratedly psycho-physical context. In these works the audience, although affected, does not intervene. The spectators contemplate, for example, the insidious attempt by one participant to prise open the eyelids of the other (*Pryings*, 1971), the intuitive capacity of the one with respect to the other in inferring the instructions to perform certain movements (*Channel*, 1971) or the innate or hypnotic domination of bodily actions (*Pull*, 1971, and *Remote Control*, 1971, respectively). In *Security Zone* (1971) the quality of physical dependence is exacerbated when Acconci walks blindfolded, with his hands tied, along a narrow jetty, supposedly in the care of the other participant, with his trust put to the test. In several of these works the vision *in situ* is doubled by video monitors, which follow the development of the performance. Nevertheless, language as such is striking by its absence, except for the audiences only and not for the participants, or in the pursuit of hypnotic rather than communicative ends.

The temporal arc of the second group of works spans the period 1971 to 1973 and it might be said that they mark the end of Acconci's performances in the pure state, in part because they had completed their cycle and in part because Acconci had recognized their configurative limitations. This kind of exhausting of creative possibilities can be perceived with sufficient clarity when we analyse these experiences from a global perspective. These performances require the critical participation of the audience, which generally has to follow a certain trajectory of perception, or at least penetrate into certain closed spaces. The motives are centred on aspects that are more mental or psychological than psychosomatic or physical. Language is the essential vehicle of interaction, duly catalysed by the spatial and iconographic environment which gives rise to a certain situation. In every case a high level of tension is manifested between microcosm and macrocosm, bordering on

non-communication, and calling to mind the circular soliloquies of Beckett or the alien otherness of meanings stressed by the psycho-linguistic theories current at the time. The works come close to being fortuitous psychodramas. Acconci speaks for himself and tries, even aggressively, to defend his territory, but at the same time pleads for someone to help him out of the obsessive traps that isolate him; in this context, shared or onanistic sex is the metaphorical correlative of desperation, revealed with fear. In *Ballroom* (1973), Acconci's last "performance", the half absent humming of the artist as he moves from spotlight to spotlight becomes a plea for help, for someone to break the psychological loops that imprison him; in *Reception Room* (1973) the shameful confessions are accompanied by repeated minimal uncoverings of the body's camouflage, and in *Untitled Project for Pier 17* (1971) these confessions have been replaced by a right to blackmail; in *Claim* (1971), Acconci brutally configures the neurotic defence of his cubicle, while in *Seedbed* (1972) the concealment is absolute and the onanistic sentence is dramatically definitive. In all of these performances there is a tone of disillusion and an obstacle that the artist takes care to neither side-step nor distort. What emerges very clearly here is that language is at once prison and liberty, and constitutes in itself an immense loop. This means that all truth is reduced to mere unstable belief, grounding both our inevitable monologue in the realm of signification and our dialogue in the realm of poetry.

Guided by Acconci's own reflections, we can say that performance art emerged with purposes of authentic interaction and, it follows, in the context of the everyday and the banal; in other words, without any spirit of singularity or magnification. Hence its rejection of scenarios and its opposition to "post-Pop happenings". It introduced situations, acts and the ephemeral into an art world still dominated by the fetishism of passive contemplation. With its physical immediacy, it gave the body the status of psychosomatic unit of consciousness, but it could not prevent the artists being converted into myths, or their performances resulting in archetypes to be copied. The experimental stopped being experimental and the interaction became pure potentiality. Nevertheless, its transitory nature was inescapably seminal for many other disciplines and genres. Without a doubt it was a necessary phase, leading in Acconci's case in particular to a more complex and expansive type of interaction, with a greater accent on the spatial and the objectual; not setting out to break existential loops but embracing them.



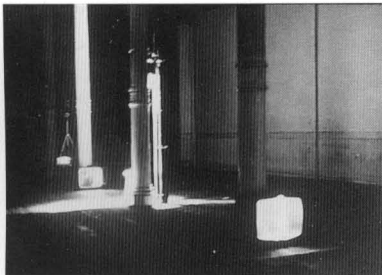
*Association Area, 1971*



### The shared space

At the beginning of 1974 Acconci produced a work which made very evident a new inflection in his creative approach (*Command Performance*, 1974). Here, visitors to the gallery were invited without more ado to take part in the configuration, but without involving the specific action of the artist, as formerly. This was a video installation, structured on the basis of the distribution of the columns in the room. A member of the public could sit on a stool in front of a video camera and a monitor, from which Acconci, lying down and seen from above, passed the initiative to them with intimate sincerity and urged them to take the lead in the performances. The camera captured the spectator's reactions and relayed these in real time to another monitor at the back of the room, visible to the audience. The space was in darkness except for the light from the monitors and a vertical spotlight which lit up the potential artist. The tone of Acconci's voice was at once tender and authoritarian, as if this were an assuming of responsibilities and not a banality of no consequence. Half way between "performance" and the plastic and acoustic activation of the space, this work marked out Acconci's subsequent configurative strategy and his bodily farewell to the interactive process.

As we have already noted in relation to the question of inclusion and exclusion, Acconci had in his day tested out with extreme caution those spaces for the transfer of art and culture constituted by galleries and museums, but he had decided to refine the direct premisses which included him as a body and a person. The contents of the performances, essentially psychological and existential, had remained highly abstract, in the sense that they were only dependent up to a certain point on their setting, even although they took place "by means of space", in that the space was in effect a materialization of the mind of the creator. That was without doubt a significant factor in ensuring that cultural mythology and the inevitable semantic confusion would end up scotching the attempt, above all in its less plastic (corporeal) facet. Paradoxically, the great simplicity and extreme reductionism applied to the presence of the artist had neutralized his authenticity as a referent, converting the performances into a kind of labelled apart, in spite of having irrupted into the artistic panorama "like a bull in a china shop". Nevertheless, just as Abstract Expressionism had been a direct forerunner of performance art, despite initially seeming to be a hopeless dead end, the wall of exigency that Acconci's "performances" constructed around themselves signalled that interactive authenticity was in any case possible.



*Command Performance*, 1974

What became very apparent was that the authentic interactive relationship was established not so much on a one to one basis but between every one of the individuals and a common magma or place, at once linguistic and material, of an infinite complexity, in which everyone was reflected and from which they derived their signs of identity, in addition to elaborating and polishing in it their conceptions of the world. The relationship was there, in that space where, as I have already noted, dialogue was possible and, what is more, possible on a poetic level. The various individuals other than the inquiring subject, interpreter and poet, formed part of that common place shared by all which could not suffer partition without being destroyed, in that the whole and the parts did not coincide. Acconci intuited then that the conventional places of cultural transfer (galleries and museums) could be constituted as metaphors of that magma instead of being mere inert nodes of communication, of flows of external information. In this way they were converted into sites or matrices of potential participation and encounter. In that shared space splashed with plastic, visual and acoustic accents Acconci himself was to be physically absent, but not his signic and configurative trace, since he had introduced himself into the common place as a hidden catalyst, in order that the spectators would imitate him. What is more, he was not alone in that instigatory venture, because culture, politics and history past and future were his faithful companions. Everything was to take place within the density of the common language which simultaneously predetermined and undetermined everyone, rather than in terms of the specific language of the artist, in that it was this which impregnated the space and its architecture with its multiple adherences and conferred on these an unfailingly collective quality totally opposed to solitary contemplative objectuality. This new focus involved configuring specific works for each particular place, most of them probably ephemeral, and conceptualizing these as suggestive structures, often endowed with inducing mechanisms of a ludic and poetic nature, related without doubt to the causal frameworks of language, of ideologies or of psychology, the most evident historical antecedent of which was the Surrealist technique of critical paranoia; at least in terms of their compositional resolution, if not in their creative genesis.

Nevertheless, I have to note here that, as was to be expected of him, Acconci went on to change the nature of his spatial interventions gradually, almost without sharp contrasts. This is probably due to the fact that there were two essential elements of his earlier works which retained their importance, above all initially. I am referring to the pre-eminent role

of language in the composition, in spite of the space being shared rather than absorbed (and the audience with it), and to the continuity of the territorial psycho-sociological influence (power field). In effect, as can be seen in the naming of the corresponding sections in the present book, Acconci is unwilling to classify the works of this phase by any other name than that of "voices" (when any knowledgeable critic would speak instead of installations, to employ the specialist jargon). What is more, when he refers in broad terms to his career as a whole, by means of the allegory of the pronominal forms he defines this part of his work as the attempt to get his voice to reach "you", although without mentioning his "I" directly. As for the coercive aspect in relation to the potential behaviours of the audience (which is perfectly coherent with the intentionality intrinsic to the phenomenological conception of beings), this is translated from the performances to the construction of the site of their induced occurrence without the least difficulty. It can even be said that the signic concretion of the interior architecture and the furniture underlines, corrects and augments the provocation. In this respect, Acconci himself recognizes and defines the gallery where the work is installed as an "image-structure which oppresses and incites". It is true that with a sufficient dose of intelligence, cunning and courage, language liberates, but most of the time it oppresses and represses. In line with this, he has no hesitation in considering the walls of the gallery as metaphors of that oppression, and extending this quality to the sound, all the more justifiably, if possible. Thus Acconci skilfully turns the question around and utilizes the oppressive contents of the signs available to him for his own ends. Indeed, he is aware that the very nature of art, not imposed but agreed, gives him an additional advantage which ensures his predominance (*in absentia*). As he says, "every work of art is made to amaze, and this makes it suspect of authoritarianism". If we add to this the intellectualist mystique and liturgy typical of the sector, that authoritarianism comes close to arrogance. In addition, the domination becomes doubly efficient because it is accepted, either from guilt or from complacency, in that between the artist and the audience there evolves a kind of mutually consenting game of submission, underpinned by complicity.

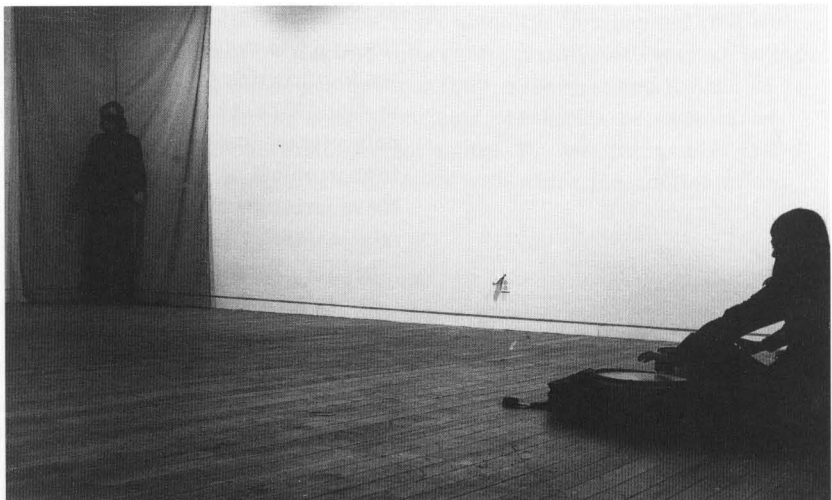
There is a first group of works, produced with one notable exception during 1974 and 1975, in which Acconci added to the generic title of "voices" (or sounds) the somewhat equivocal subtitle of "fiction", no doubt as connotation more than denotation, because it seems to me that he is trying here not to stigmatize the virtuality of the projected images or the instability of the meanings that can be assigned to the objects but

quite the opposite, to show the survival of the fictive (in conventional terms) as the ineradicable complement or correlative of what we might wish to define in some way as reality; in that in the common place of dialogue and of interaction the amalgam between the fictive and the real, like the mix of the artificial with the natural, is symbiotic and inextricable. These works are resolved figuratively in a way that is at once similar and opposite. The similarity consists in the compositional multiplicity, and the opposition established because at times that plurality in the composition is addressed on the basis of the criterion of the chaotic and redundant superimposing of planes and sounds perceived from a fixed point, while on other occasions it is evidenced by means of a perceptive trajectory structured in various compartments, in which objects and sounds are disseminated with great precision. In the first case, the fiction collides with the observer as an enveloping reality; in the second, by contrast, it is the perceiver who constructs the fiction on the basis of the plastic and visual reality with which he or she is presented.

Nevertheless, as I said, there is in that group of works an exception whose facture makes it anachronistic, in that it was created in 1972, when Acconci was bringing the more linguistic facet of his performances to its culmination. The theme here is still the existential localization of the artist, but now on the verge of disappearing because an impossibility had become apparent, in the style of *Seedbed* (1972), although where formerly there had been concealment there was now complete absence. At the same time, in *Anchors*, as the work is called, presence as such was replaced by the voice and there was a careful compensating of colours and tonalities between the members of a set of metaphorical objects and between these and the gallery, so that in compositional and iconographic terms the work fitted in with the aesthetic which Acconci was subsequently to apply to the "shared space", of which it was thus a fairly specific foretaste. Spread over the floor of the gallery were various objects in the form of shelters: a canvas stretched between two bars to form a cradle, a blanket, a box open on one side, etc., then a brightly colour bed — the objects were chromatically bland and toned in with the floor — and an armchair, also in a strident colour, on which the observer could sit. In every shelter or object there were personal items of clothing scattered around, and a looped, unending audio tape. The sound coming from each zone was heard in succession, with short pauses. In the shelters there were univocal sighs in regression, like the ruins of a language; in the bed, a call for protection with a disturbing suggestion of incest, together with the assertion "...I lose my voice ... I am forced to speak in metaphor". The

possibly solicitous observer was then assailed by "I don't need anything real ...don't help me". In other words, do not help me, just share the metaphorical space with me, in fact you are already inside it, do not destroy it with your direct actions towards me.

Two years later, in 1974, Acconci produced *Memory Box III*, which seems to derive in formal terms from the canvas cradle-shelter in *Anchors*. This was indeed a cradle, with the sides closed off and with a curtain across the opening, all in a soft colour and integrated with the floor of the gallery as if it were emerging from it as if from a trap-door. The interior was in darkness except for the two slide projectors which emitted images in opposite directions, one upwards and the other downwards. In acknowledgement of the subtitle chosen by the artist (*Vanishing Point*), a mattress was pressed against the sharp edge at the end of the cradle, and inside this a tape repeated at dictation speed which in parallel with the sequence of images was a counterpoint between generic and archetypal film scenes and subjective but anonymous iconographic references. The observer was trapped in a film between a number of visual and acoustic planes. A life and a memory were in process of construction, but on the point of slipping away and collapsing, in the same way that at the end of



*Supply Room*, 1971

the room three dimensions were converted into one. It was an incitement to share a breakdown and a story continually revised; in other words, a reality fashioned out of fiction and always open.

*Other Voices for a Second Sight* from the same year abounded in elements of cinematic composition, multiplying planes, sounds and images with an even greater complexity. The evanescent cradle was replaced by a recording studio which commanded views of two side rooms, through which in turn there was a narrow glimpse of the exterior. One of the rooms was black, with posts, the other white with rows of beams laid on the floor; everywhere there were plastic sheets serving as screens, coloured spotlights and projectors. These showed images of Acconci's body, greatly enlarged and at times masked by or combined with political posters, and at other times shots of him in movement. Next to the observer there was a tape on which Acconci, improvising as a disc-jockey, told stories of death relating to the past, the present and the future, which nevertheless invariably ended with a pleasant and intimate piece of music. Here once again was fiction as rule of life; or to put it another way: live in ambiguity and die in certainty.

Returning to a more structured type of configuration, whose aesthetic connection with *Anchors* is more than evident, Acconci gives a 180° turn to his recreation of fiction as the key of life and creation, in order to emphasize its importance from an opposing perspective. The observer becomes an agent of the fiction instead of simply being hit with it, and the space is segmented into mutually articulated compartments, instead of tending towards integration and overlapping. This is the case, for example, in *Plot* (1974–1975), the title of which is already highly suggestive in its polyvalence, indicating as it does not only a narrative plot but a topographical or spatial distribution and a conspiracy. In effect, both of these latter meanings are very much to the point. We know that the relationship of the individual with reality is very largely linguistic, and language thus shapes the specificity of each one of us to a great extent. Culture, its evolution and its convulsions are essentially based on the continued emergence of new ways of interpreting metaphors and on the assigning of new meanings to the same objects. But since language is also power and convention, a vigorous culture will have a necessarily conspiratorial character. It is also clear that meanings are not in fact discovered but assigned. Nevertheless, every language requires a structure and a causal framework, to say nothing of a story, on which to rest and into which to fit nominal and adjectival ascriptions. In consequence, that

causal structure tends to condition bestowed meanings and thus fiction very strongly. So, then, in *Plot* Acconci brought together the structural conditioning factors and the conspiratorial sources of the fiction, by means of a kind of topography of objects in conjunction with a spatial parody of the story.

The space of the gallery was segmented into compartments, each one the repository of a chapter of the story, as was announced on the board set up for this purpose. Loudspeakers installed in each section delivered the corresponding text. At the same time, each of the literary precincts contained an object, taken as being an art object, with a highly defined form but an extremely diffuse signification, so that content and formalization were subsumed in literality (without doubt a reference to North American art). With all of this, Acconci pushed the situation into the realm of unease or disillusion, because he almost obliged the spectator to assign meanings and at the same time undermined the possibility of doing so. The texts were varied, some of them referring to the difficulty of establishing meaning, but the others commenting ironically on Acconci's relations with the American and European art circuits. This approach to fiction, diametrically opposed to the one which immediately preceded it, was to have seminal long-term consequences, in that it opened up a path towards the cultural, historical and political concretion of the configurations from which there was now no turning back. In effect, *Plot* induced the spectator to take part in the genesis of fiction and not simply to be aware of its ubiquity. This implied that we possess and exercise a critical and thus poetic faculty with respect to the shifting relationship between signs and their meanings, and invited us to extend that attitude to the equally unstable connection between forms and contents intrinsic to the objectual galaxy. The two things also called for a very keen awareness of the contexts with which the configurations were to interact.

*Plot* thus went quite a long way beyond the pure delineation of the shared metaphorical space in which Acconci assembled his audience, in that it took as read a partisan proactivity in the universe of signification whose aim was to interact, not to predominate (as the aim of the historic avant-garde had been). This proactivity was generated and assisted by the artist, in order to make it clear that it could not be renounced by the perceivers and, in addition, required a concrete contextualization once the intimate, emotional and psychological space of the creator had been replaced as the arena of contact by that other, common space in which all the experiences



*The Peplemobile, 1979*

and all the nominations assigned and attached to them intersected, on the basis of certain well defined space-time co-ordinates. The contextualization thus carried out by Acconci was posited above all in terms of cultural and political localization or, more precisely, in specifically American terms, which was wholly consistent if it was a question of intervening in the discursive "corpus" then in force. We have already noted that this contextualizing aspect was underlined in *Plot* by means of the texts of the chapters and the objects that illustrated them. Nevertheless, there are two works which also announced or confirmed that drift towards the ideological and cultural, which was to involve in its turn the far-sighted poeticizing of objects and architectures. These were both visual works, one shot on Super-8 and the other on video, but for Acconci they possessed a supreme importance in serving to centre things, after a long time spent tensing the privacy-publicity dichotomy in the almost exclusively psycho-communicative sphere. It is true that these works are not as explicit in composition as either *Command Performance* or *Anchors*, but this is so because these are genre pieces; in other words, they were thought out and conceived as film and video respectively. In any case, they were openly oriented towards sociological contextualization, in spite of being so highly self-reflective. No doubt this is why Acconci likes to place them together with the works dealt with in this section and not with the performances considered in the previous section, even if he does subtitle them, somewhat sarcastically: "Keep on talking to yourself. It's only a film".

The Super-8 film was shot and edited during 1973 and 1974, under the title *My Word* (in the sense of reflective monologue). This is a silent film, the images intercut with written phrases recreating a soliloquy on art as personal activity. The camera focuses on the artist in his studio, and also shows us the building in which this is situated. The intimate tone is reinforced by the fact that the words are directed exclusively at the female sex. The film is pervaded by a certain atmosphere of guilt, perhaps related to an inadmissible strategy of creating a protected space in which to escape from the outside world, behind the appearance of establishing a supposedly direct and authentic relationship with others. Intentionally, as the film draws towards its end, that end does not come; it is as if Acconci were squeezing out with relish the last instants of a relationship with the audience which it would be impossible to establish again. In effect, in his words, *My Word* was virtually the last occasion on which we find Acconci's "I" struggling desperately to retain its identity. In this respect, there are very clear parallels between this film and the subjective dissolution in the



cradle of *Memory Box III* or the necessary death of the stable "I" of *Other Voices for a Second Sight*. Subsequently, during 1976 and 1977, Acconci made a long video, structured in three sections, which he entitled *The Red Tapes*. The work is complex because it has various levels of aesthetic accentuation, carefully interwoven with one another. Without a doubt, the voice is the compositional element which directs the appearance and the collapse of the images, but the relationship within the images themselves between highly concentrated foregrounds and landscape backgrounds is also of great importance. Utilizing the same similes used by its creator, we can say that the first part is a detective novel, the second a sculpture and the third a scene from a stage play, but all three refer in the last analysis to a common motive, that of the geographic and historical localization of the creator. The type of focus, the language and the rhythm and mobility of the image vary according to the configurative objective of every section. First Acconci, alone, superimposed on the landscape or observing it in the distance; then, still alone, he seems to enter the landscape, walking between its objects, and finally, now with other people, he proceeds to describe that landscape slowly and inexorably. A landscape, in any case, that is completely American and ready to be poetically altered.

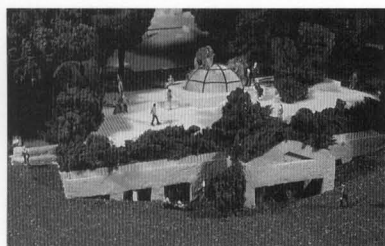
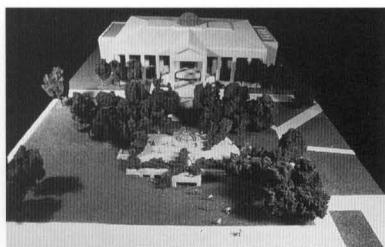
For Acconci, the second half of the seventies marked the culmination of his search for a place of creative encounter and communication that would transcend the mere crude unfolding of his privacy. As we have seen, what that discovery called for in terms of the necessary contextualization was a very specific concretion of the sites and a critical incursion into the socio-cultural fabric, but the compositional role of language continued to exercise an unalloyed protagonism. In effect, the sites, the interior architecture and the distribution of objects configured a space to speak in, in which to exhort and convoke verbally. At the same time, the spatial structure, the physical impediments, the mechanisms and the ludic devices which configured the works were a metaphorical duplicate of the linguistic framework which conditioned everything, so that the dominant presence of suspended loudspeakers, or the perfect camouflaging of these in walls, furniture and artefacts, was by no means gratuitous. Acconci also groups these works within the section "voices" (or sounds), although with the gloss "news" or the clarification "this is real", in direct contrast to the use of the term "fiction" to subtitle the works that preceded them. In any case, Acconci does not impose his discourse, already in itself entirely objectivized, but intervenes in and alters the existing from the inside, utilizing its own potential energy and its unpredictable chaotic outpourings. He invokes, assists, seduces and induces in order that the

collective action may be initiated not in the neurotic substratum of reflection but in the ambiguous realm of discursive oppression and alienation. That interactive incitement leaves no opening for the contemplation of the kind of high-flown kitsch which typically impregnates the artistic media. What is posited in the shared metaphorical space is debate, the taking of a position and its committed defence, and not the exquisite communion with the artist in some supposed catharsis, no doubt culminating in an ecstatic veneration of the creator, his acts and his objects. Nevertheless, the partisan strategy in the cultural realm had its inevitable parallel in the specificity of the sites, in that the venues or spaces in which Acconci was constructing his works were either well established on the cultural circuit or effectively labelled as alternative. He was thus confronting genuine discursive icons, which were far more absorbent than refractory with respect to the anti-conventional. This was to result in the long run in a new inflection in Acconci's creative approach, this time towards construction in the collective landscape, but in more immediate terms it was to mean the functional (or contextual) alteration of the exhibition spaces and the deliberate counterpointing of interiors and exteriors.

There are two works from this period, both dated 1976, which make bitter allusion to the domination of discourse, one in a very specific way and the other generically; one putting the audience under pressure in relation to a totem, the other trapping them in a claustrophobic den. In neither of the two is there any real way of escape to an exterior that forms any part of the composition, so that they constitute zones of intense concentration with no possible dispersion of the messages. Nevertheless, the motive they recreate effectively makes nonsense of the functionality of the spaces in which they are installed, whose undisclosed disgraces they lay bare. The more concrete is entitled *The American Gift* and consists of a cubicle with white walls and openings in the corners. Hanging from the ceiling is a black cube at a certain height from the floor. The edges of the base are picked out with a border of light blue, emphasizing the apparent levitation of the imposing volume. There is hardly any space between the hanging block and the panels that surround it, just enough to accommodate stools for the audience. The cube has a loudspeaker inside it, with another concealed beneath the seats. The cube emits sounds and voices that are unequivocally North American, while the other tape presents a situation of European submission to the artistic dictates of the United States. The required obedience is symbolized by the cadenced repetition of a litany directed by Acconci (the content of which ties in

with the texts of *Plot* and *The Red Tapes*). The dark cube carries clear totemic reminiscences (of the Muslim Kaaba, for example) and at the same time suggests a minimalist bomb on the point of exploding; in short, a perfect package for the "American message". The generic work, called *Under-History Lessons*, was installed as part of a group show of already established "names" at a Long Island art school, which described itself as an independent event. Acconci was doubtful about whether or not to take part, but in the end he deliberately chose the most lugubrious place in the building; the boiler room, which was like a gloomy crypt. Underneath the steam apparatus there was something like an empty sink, not very deep. Acconci extended and rested on the floor the room's only two light-bulbs and set out benches and stools. A pair of loudspeakers detailed a thoroughly accepted and absolute indoctrination. In that gloomy space, the atmosphere of which would have delighted Lang or Murnau, the libertarian myth of education was blown to pieces. These two works had a single leitmotiv: language is power.

Also in 1976, Acconci created the paradigmatic *Where We Are Now (Who Are We Anyway?)*, in the Sonabend gallery in New York's Soho. Here, too, he established a certain relationship of linguistic domination, but less aggressive, in that it was left on the level of statement. By means of coloured panels, the gallery space was transformed into a passage-chamber with an unavoidable entrance and a suggestive exit towards the exterior void. A long table with stools around it ended up as a springboard through a window. A suspended loudspeaker on the table opened and chaired the meeting, while the second-hand of a clock could be heard ticking in the background, but then suddenly recognized the impossibility of mutual understanding. Another loudspeaker on the wall nearby issued a summons to political action and personal commitment. All at once there commenced an — in that case, tragic — game of musical chairs. Nothing concrete, all very disperse, except the certainty of failure and the irremediable punishment of the desperate leap. This work set out to stimulate the activity of the audience and created an incipient mechanism, while at the same time spatially transcending the conventional expository frame.



*Proposal for Supreme Court, Carson City, 1989*

Over the next few years Acconci developed the idea of mechanism, which often took the form of self-activating devices. These ingenious artefacts destabilized the exhibition itinerary, filling it with moving obstacles that had to be dodged or configuring machinery which decontextualized the space to the point of diluting it in the exterior. As a result, the montages



*Face of the Earth, 1984*

were ubiquitous and provisional, in the sense that they could have been anywhere, thus undermining the protagonism of the gallery space as such. At the same time, the language tended to be diluted in those pieces of poetic engineering, not only by its own ambiguity or generality, but because it seemed to be engulfed by silence to the extent that it adhered to the mechanical paraphernalia. *Movable Floor* (1979) and *Exercise Machine for an Eternal Return* (1979) were configured as closed compositions, but left no option of static equilibrium. In the first of these, Acconci covered the floor with roller-skates connected to one another by cables, while a pair of headphones emitted disco music and recordings of the coup in Chile, respectively. In the second, the tangle of roller-skates was further complicated with a horizontal ladder which required an act of tightrope-walking, and a second ladder emerging from a bicycle which was transformed into a table with built-in stools, while a loudspeaker issues instructions to the effect that steps backwards are to have prevalence over steps forwards. It seems to me that both works allude to the lack of solid foundations in the political arena (for the electors rather than not for the professional politicians), because the floor slips away from under our feet (in the first case), or because we always come back to the same place (in the second). The two works no doubt

invite participative action, but more as acquiescent recognition than as decision or choice, in such a way that the apparently considerable ludic component is neutralized by the tragic or pathetic content of the historical or social references.

There are, however, other works in which the dramatic or cynical note is not so caustic and the counterpoint is a perfectly compensated articulation, but without eliminating the evident touches of cruelty they afford a glimpse of. Thus, in *Monument to the Dead Children* (1978) a plank horizontally extended the middle landing of the flight of steps at the exit of a museum (the Stedelijk in Amsterdam) and was stabilized by an imposing counterweight supported by a pulley. The cruelty of the trap overlapped in the precarious spring-lever with the hurried exit from an outstanding museological icon. In *VD Lives/TV Must Die* (1978), interior and exterior were united by means of the nexus of revolt. Taking advantage of the distribution of columns in a room, Acconci fashioned two enormous aggressive catapults from elastic bands and tensors, and positioned these opposite one another ready to fire bowling balls at a number of switched-on television sets. The televisual brain-washing was intensified with a crude and rude sexual phraseology, mixed with echoes of a noisy disturbance in the street outside. The spectators were imprisoned by a war on two fronts, but realized that they had weapons for both, since one of the devices was equipped with an additional elastic band which deflected the projectile towards the window. The same kind of impetus towards aesthetic flight into the environment was given a further poetic and random turn in the montage *Decoy for Birds and People* (1979). This work was configured from a number of aluminium ladders which see-sawed simultaneously, but at different angles, on the window ledges of a building. Hung all along the cables which operated the set of moving ladders there were cages, with tape machines inside them playing recordings of bird song. Suddenly the trilling of one of the imprisoned birds rose in pitch to a paroxysm; a bell then sounded, as if to acknowledge a correct response, and the cage would then supposedly open and set free the lucky individual (bird or human). In this respect, *People Mobile* (1979) is that expansive impulse made plastic reality, but at the same time it marks an end to the predominance of linguistic concerns in Acconci's configurations and is an evident foretaste of what was to come. This colophon work combines reminiscences of the early performances with the imperative of socio-cultural contextualization and amalgamates the partisan essence of the poetic with the expansion towards the landscape and with the unstoppable substitution of doing for saying. The piece

involved a disguised van which stopped every day at a different place in the city (Amsterdam). The vehicle carried a number of metal panels which served to configure a different sculpture at every stop (a shelter, a table with seats or a place for people to get up on and meet). Through a loudspeaker, Acconci addressed both terrorists like himself and the ordinary passers-by (the idea was that the latter would recognize the partisan essence of his knowledge, in so far as they were part and parcel of it) and invited one and all to join the poetic guerrilla war (as effective as it was apparently innocuous). There was no longer any reason for the shared metaphorical space, that total common place of dialogue and of poetry, to be confined to galleries, museums or alternative art spaces and simply be alluded to, referred to or suggested. It was necessary to take a hand in constructing it beyond the precincts conventionally assigned to it, and in this way mark out the tracks of Utopia.

#### Inevitable convergence

The always present premiss of interactivity, the indispensable socio-cultural contextualization and the unstoppable tendency towards immersion in the environment, together with the increasing dilution of spoken and written language in the metonymy of the signs and icons absorbed by convention, all impelled Acconci irresistibly towards the urban landscape and towards sculpture in the loosest sense. Certainly, the configurative intention was still the same and so, too, was the aim of actively penetrating the signic framework and poeticizing in its interior; but the linguistic and metaphoric redundancies tended to disappear as the artist increasingly abandoned the propagandistic or exhortative stance in his works and speech ceased to predominate over the construct. In fact, Acconci had made use of gadgets and architectures in earlier works for the purpose of reinforcing his verbal messages, as if materially duplicating the structures of the discourse. Similarly, the dense metaphorical content of the exhibition venues themselves enveloped the shared space he was trying to configure, a problematic which prompted the continued allusion to the exterior space. There was then a configurative *dérive* towards architecture, urbanism, clothing and furniture, in such a way that the approach is total and osmotic in relation to the physical and cultural environment, and does not involve any kind of superimposing. This is so because it is no longer a question of creating a metaphorical space for sharing in the form of a model, but of introducing oneself into the



*People's Wall, 1985*

everyday landscape as the *People Mobile* demonstrated in its guerrilla raids, since that landscape is in itself both reality and a metaphor of the human condition, in so far as the latter is defined as the continual re-describing of the environment in which we are immersed on the basis of analogies and metaphors.

We need, however, to analyse that *dérive* above and beyond the internal logical, in itself very solid, of Acconci's development and fit this into the history of art, returning for that purpose to certain ideas sketched out in the first section and developing these rather more fully. Thus, we can see that Acconci and many of his generation were influenced by Jackson Pollock in three ways: that of the body action, that of the endless spatiality of the drippings, and that of the impossible safeguarding of the self by means of the immaterial nexus of the painting. This had a great deal to do with the way that Acconci and others responded to the re-emergence of painting in the late seventies with the montages and interior architectures they installed in the galleries once the psychological and sociological actions had proved ineffective as a means of retaining the identity of the creator in the process of interaction with the audiences. Interactivity and environment pushed artists towards the encounter with the shared metaphorical space, but it was impossible to pour scorn on either reductive abstraction or on the traditional contemplative passivity of the work of art without reinstating the thoroughly landscapist unifying concept that had dominated artistic creation in general from the end of the Renaissance until its ruthless destruction by the divisive and structuralist determinism of the 19th century. And that reinstatement could not be pictorial, or more precisely, not solely pictorial, because although in many ways similar, things had changed in terms of their order of priority and their scope.

We know that from the 17th century to the 19th, landscape was first represented and then language imitated it in appearance and in structure. In the last third of the 20th century, in contrast, the linguistic is not superposed on the panorama but merged with it. At the same time, it appears that its reality can only be validated linguistically. An immense loop is thus generated, which is nothing other than a version of the anthropocentric principle; in other words, landscape is what it is because we are included in it as we are. This fact of being inside the canvas, not only materially but mentally, means assuming multi-dimensionality, materiality and tactility, and thus embracing sculpture with conviction, while conserving those typically pictorial aspects of it such as frontality,

image, colour and light. It has to be said here that sculpture, which has been more fortunate than the composition of landscape, not only survived the avant-garde hurricane but thanks to it managed to shake itself free of its ancestral burden, anchored in the commemorating of public events, which had condemned it to a boring and submissive monumentalism, while at the same time it liberated itself from the pedestal and totemic verticality to extend itself in space. That dynamic, in the view of certain prestigious critics, would have constituted at once its triumph and its failure, in that the loss of the site would have condemned it to a landscapist or objectual dissolution. Nevertheless, in complete contrast, the new concept of landscape was to reaffirm the pertinence of the site and, taking advantage of that liberation from the old academicisms so arduously achieved by sculpture, was to make all the genres converge towards a total art, which was so by virtue of its coherent exercise and not from the imposition of any type of ideology. Acconci clearly perceived that that totality coincided with the shared metaphorical space he was looking for, and this determined the particular nature of his inflection from 1980 on.

Acconci immediately recognized himself in that immense landscape, crucible of all metaphors past, present and future, but this was a humble and willing recognition which accepted the Aristotelian principle of mimesis. Nature could not be surpassed, only substituted; it was precisely in replicating nature's own process of creation that true imitation consisted. In his creative reflections he contrasted an ethereal and mental conception of the landscape, unequivocally pictorial in origin, albeit passed through a cinematic filter, with one that was three-dimensional and experimental. The final and definitive expression of the visual approach to the landscape was to be the "void" of the "pure idea", which in terms of composition meant "not being the architecture of the earth but of the air". A perfect concretion of that focus would be the C. D. Friedrich's frequently invoked monk on the lonely beach, off to one side of the canvas with the imposing sky massed above his diminutive figure. Acconci, meanwhile, illustrated the question with great acuity, comparing the typical railway passenger of the 19th century, travelling along and looking out at the panorama, with the 20th-century film spectator, sitting in his seat, passively living a kind of dream. From this point of view, the real-life passer-by would be a character or extra with no specific role in a film with no discernible overall plot, whose well-meaning actuation would result in his colliding with things; in other words, an embodiment of what we might call critical or poetic materialism (with Spinozan resonances, of

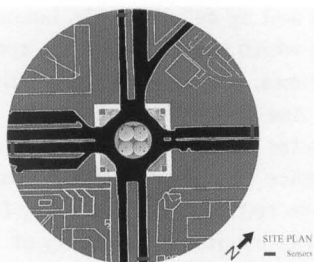


course). It would thus be a question of a genuine "sculptural collision" between the void mental space on the one hand and matter and objects on the other. In any case, we should note that while the beginning of this interactive dynamic might be random and arbitrary, its development was not, because it entailed a clear constructive — or more precisely, configurative — volition to "guard against the pure idea", whose principal instrument was language. In effect, the artist as passer-by turned the perceptions of all his senses into language and its figures, going on to reassign (or not) meanings and the relations between them and reconfiguring matter and objects in consequence. "With language under his arm he warded off mental virtuality". In this way, landscape "for seeing" was replaced by that other landscape which was a realm of experience for bodies, in which they inserted themselves and intervened.

In this context, corporeality took on a special importance. It was not so much that it had been unimportant before, but that it was now to be a determining factor in the metaphorical readings of the material environment which Acconci was to recreate in his new expansive inflection. In effect, it is quite obvious that the body had been an essential sign in all of Acconci's performances and that subsequently, in spite of its physical absence, the later architectures and montages were always configured in corporeal terms and on a bodily scale, but with the shift to interacting directly with the environment the question became more delicate and risky, both from excess and by default. Body, language and measure are the trio of categories on which the history of art and aesthetics have rested from the earliest times, the last two terms being the natural continuation of the first, the one mental and the other physical. Nevertheless, the differential factor which marks the age and the culture which envelop Acconci is the absence of premisses of a theological and rationalist order, thus making language contingent. That is why this inseparable triad can be seen to explain the inevitable circularity of human knowledge and the immense tautology which defines life and art. As a result, creative interaction within this tremendously potent loop necessarily had to have a dimension and a character that were eminently corporeal and human.

The parallel of this argument in the history of art strictly so-called was that given the nature of the landscape within which the creative work was inevitably inscribed, it was impossible to use materials historically marked by their subservience to transcendental discourses, as was the case of stone or the bronze with respect to monumental commemoration, or metal

in relation to the progressionist celebration of technology. Acconci considered that banal, everyday materials ought to be used instead, materials affected by the same rhythm of deterioration as those habitually used in construction, in decoration and in clothing, in order to avoid superfluous adherences and ordering impositions. With regard to the form, this should steer clear of the authoritarian quality intrinsic to the conventional work of art and configure instead a place to be in, a place in which the observer would literally feel "at home", even if it were a home "turned upside down"; furniture to sit down on, even if it were marginally altered by dysfunction, and clothes which were in fact totally unusable. Acconci felt that at bottom the three things were very far from alien to the traditional concept of the work of art, although they might seem to be, in that the only thing which had really changed was the space of exhibition, which was no longer separate from real life. At the same time, the clothing, the architecture and the furniture were objects drenched with conventionalisms, and on that account, pristine metaphors of power, sex and religion, thanks above all to their equidistance from an obverse of sheltered privacy and a reverse of exposure to public reading. This contrast, in addition, was particularly intense in American society, essentially mobile and drawn to frontier adventure, and at the same time very sentimentally attached to the family home and to the most immediate roots; trapped between the multi-culturalism of massive immigration and the defence and veneration of genuinely American values. In this way, the contextualization would cease to be problematic and speech could be replaced by the loquacity inherent in signs when these were manipulated or associated in the right way.



*Project for Traffic Circle, 1999*

The ideas of spatial ambivalence, of counterpoint between the public and the private, of mobility and of involuntary cultural submission were addressed with distanced irony in the constructions which Acconci produced for the most part between 1980 and 1984. At first sight clearly reminiscent of the mechanical artefacts used so profusely in the previous phase, these were architectures which could be erected or assembled at will by the spectator, who on occasion also acted as an involuntary agent of propaganda. In *Instant House* (1980), for example, the action of the visitor sitting on a swing seat raised four boards painted with the American flag, in this way creating a schematic house, but even as this was happening the stars and stripes which covered the inside walls turned into Soviet insignia on the outside walls. Without a doubt, the propaganda trap generically underlined the potent cultural and political metaphors attaching to the idea of the house as primordial icon, but there was also

here a specific allusion to the conservative discourse of post-war North America, which defined itself by opposition to the secular Communist enemy up until the fall of the Berlin Wall. In *Mobile Home*, from the same year, the set of superimposed houses on rails was carefully painted in earthy and bluey tones to emphasize a certain idealized rusticity. By means of a clothes-line covered with shirts joined at the cuffs and tied to a bicycle, the spectator deployed the little houses and converted the almost pornographic space of the shack into a properly private and enclosed home. However, as soon as the cyclist got off the bike the shack was opened up to indiscreet exposure once again. The point was further reinforced by a song, the lines of which were superimposed or linked together in accordance with the position of the complex. In *Fan City* (1981) the audience could circularly deploy sections of metal in the shape of butterfly wings and thus put up a series of bivouac tents, each of which, according to the text on the canvas, capable of providing shelter for a group of homeless people. In contrast with the painful reality of social segmentation and exclusion, as the complex was assembled there rose up in the centre of the circle an anthropomorphic figure which turned out to be a deliberately inadequate humanist archetype, in view of the social segmentation it seems to culminate.

In other later works from the same period Acconci moves away from providing mechanical aid to the composition and concentrates his configurative poetics on upsetting the stability of concepts vital to the American way of life, habitually associated with the idea of the family dwelling, such as unity, solid settlement, balance and shelter. To do this he utilized architectonic dislocation and inversion, in conjunction with the creation of unsuspected dwellings. In *Bad Dream House* (1983) for example, he composed a house out of three other houses. Two of these, constructed from wood disguised with brick-patterned paper, stood upside down on one of the eaves of their pitched roof and rested against one another along one of the edges of the base. Inserted into the cradle thus configured was the third house, made of perspex like a greenhouse, also upside down. In keeping with the inverted position, the floors were painted blue and the roofs green; there were stairs communicating to the three modules and upside-down furniture which could be sat on with some effort; in the plastic house, some panels were totally transparent, and others partly so, while others were mirrors, tinted in different tones. In *House of Cars* (1983), the houses have been replaced by automobiles, piled up and interconnected with rooms parodying those of a real house. Here the iconic density of the single-family home is combined with the almost

clichéd metaphor of the horse-ride of former times, the modern equivalent of which is the car, in addition to the overtones of sex and consumerist opulence always suggested by a vehicle lying on its back.

Also in 1983 Acconci carried out a paradigmatic work entitled *Sub-Urb*, in which the allusion is not so much to the suburb as to the subterranean city. In fact this is a linear house in negative, dug into the ground. The surface which partially covers it is of artificial grass, on a series of fixed and sliding panels, with each panel marked with a letter like the squares of an alphabet puzzle. When the openings are blocked, we can see a central gallery which separates 14 niches, with four words on each side of this, and when the openings are opened by sliding the panels these spell out the term "Sub-Urb", while covering over the gallery. Here once again the colours, and the inclusion of little clouds, emphasize the inversion of the building. On descending the steps, doors have to be opened, which thus modifies the space, blocking it off in part. Once in the gallery, decorated on either side with the American flag, it is then necessary to pass along this in order to enter the cells. Here the visitor finds opposing benches facing blinds covered with words, so that by shifting position it is fairly easy to construct antithetical pairs of words which relate to attitudes, feelings and commitments. It is quite clear that what Acconci was configuring with this work was a direct and aggressive plastic counterpoint to the North American idealization of home as the crucible of frontier adventures and the secure haven of all the traditional values. In fact the work points in the same critical direction as *Fan City*, but replaces the ludic impulse generated by the optional montage with an unsettling and inquisitorial passage through a dark subterranean labyrinth.

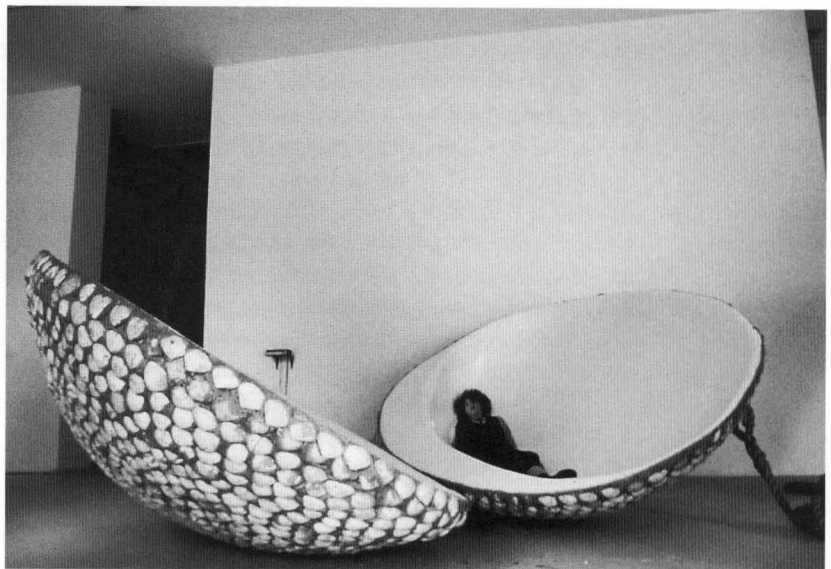
From 1984 until well into the nineties, Acconci's work actively revolved around clothing and furniture, applying the same method of upsetting the conventionalisms materialized and configured in both, but now positing dysfunctions rather less aggressively than he had done with the altered houses, because the risk of metaphorical dissolution of the object was greater on account of its lower iconic intensity and less abstract functional association. The tension between privacy and publicity with the intermediary camouflage afforded by consumer products is brilliantly recreated in *Shirt of Pockets/Jacket of Pockets* (1993). The transparent clothes show the bodies under them, except when the numerous pockets of which they are made up are filled with objects. In *Virtual Intelligence Mask* (1993), the same tension is converted into non-communicative isolation and subservience to the media, in that the person wearing the mask has

two small television screens in front of his or her eyes showing images of their surroundings, filmed by a pair of cameras on the person's head. The wearer's mouth is hidden behind a television, which faces outwards, and at ear level there is a radio, again with the loudspeaker pointing away from the wearer. The audience can tune in both pieces of apparatus to any of the regular channels. A similar motive is present in the wall cupboard entitled *Head Storage* (1984), which is indeed in the form of a head. Covered with mirroring glass, it repels the curiosity of the observers, and when the compartments are opened, the interior is seen to be completely black. At the same time, the segmentation of the space inside the cupboard is complex but perfectly ordered, probably in allusion to the mental *dirigisme* exercised by conventions. That same subservience to convention manifestly underpins the design of *Maze Table* (1985). This is a square of glass cut at different levels to form nine tables with their respective benches. The spectators can only squeeze with difficulty between the tables and are very likely to bump into one another. That collusion/collision of bodies which Acconci regards as "promiscuous" by nature is also configured in the piece of wooden furniture entitled *Big Baby Floor* (1985), which is a conical trunk with hollows in the form of babies in the foetal position, on which people can sit. The collective nature of the whole clashes here with the reference to prenatal solitude. In *Adjustable Wall Bra* (1990) the adjustment consists in the multiple positions that the huge bra can be made to adopt in space by means of cables and pulleys. The female undergarment thus configures spaces that are at once private and Oedipal or pleasurable, exuding guilty fantasies and emphasizing the sexual root of all our behaviours. Sex, convention and social content come together as an aesthetically corrosive complex in the multiple articulation of fluorescent beds configured by *Multi-Beds* (1991).

It might well be said that from 1988 on, and above all in the course of the nineties, Acconci made his definitive move into the urban landscape. In this respect, the works produced during the first half of the eighties around the theme of the single-family house have an intermediary character, with one or two notable exceptions such as *Sub-Urb*, because in scale and in conception these could even be exhibited in the spaces of the conventional art circuit and did not require a greater degree of integration into the environment. It is clearly significant here that the artist himself should have grouped those major works under the title of "Games and Prototypes". What Acconci's immersion, "with language under his arm", in that conglomerate heap of nature and artifice in continual transformation that is the urban space meant in terms of the interactive

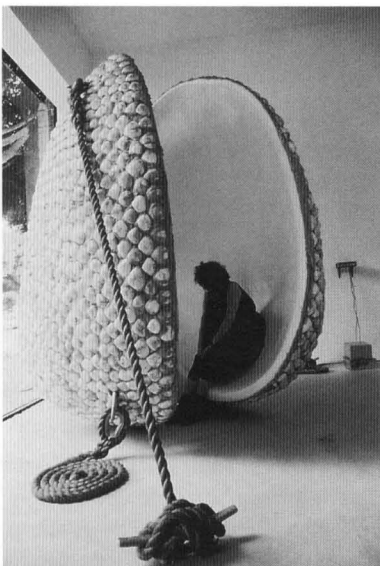
landscape was the profession of a particular type of public art and, in consequence, the assumption of a certain positioning of the artist with respect to the what and the how of his interaction. Demanding the utmost of himself, as always, Acconci recognized on the one hand that such a positioning entailed the "abandoning" of the whole system of privileges and of notoriety associated with the art circuit, solidly established by modernity as a social superstructure, because the creation of art would then cease to be something marked off and separate from the customary activities of life. So it was a matter of ensuring that art did not set itself up as some aestheticist director of life and was instead incorporated as a fundamental vital function; in other words, art as life, and not the other way round. This entailed an acceptance of anonymity and absence, but this requirement was not in any way incoherent in terms of the essence of the creative phenomenon, which by definition implied an absolute casting off of identity when it was genuine.

On the other hand, Acconci noted, the action of art extended the breadth and depth of its influence. On the traditional art circuit, fame was contrasted to a "marginal" public impact, in that the role of the artist is



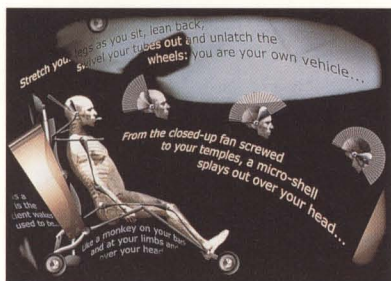
*Convertible Clam Shelter, 1990*

perfectly placed functionally and socially, and the dissemination of his or her message efficiently controlled. In public art, by contrast, the creative artist experiences an appreciable "gain in position", being able to impinge on the "central body of culture" and reach the "ordinary citizen" and not only those with an interest in art. His visual poetics affects the established conventions even without setting out to do so, because it "merges with the world and its organizational structures". In addition, that form of configuring neutralizes the distance that the dominant aura of the traditional art object creates. In this context, the artist cannot seek to predominate in a panorama in which he himself is also included, so that he has to be content with "complicating the plot, coming in by the back door". But if this is a marginal position on the level of intervention or interaction, it is not so on the level of effects, thanks to the intrinsic characteristics of the landscape which receives those comparatively small creative impulses. In effect, that landscape is society, life and the world as a whole, and the evolution of all of these takes place on the basis of minute mutations, which continually impinge on an enormously complex framework of interdependencies and provoke far-reaching and almost unforeseeable changes. It seems safe to affirm, then, that public art as we have defined it here can be a generator of poetic mutations as effective as those aleatory mutations that mark the rhythm of nature.



Now, although public art must form part of the world without seeking to impose any kind of order, it does have an active part to play in re-positing the material siting of human beings and the relations between them, catalysing the individual experience and the resulting analytical introspection, Acconci observes. In other words, it has to help bring about the "deconstruction" of identity and its subsequent reconstruction in a circular process without end. It therefore has to promote the emergence of a sufficiently transparent and diaphanous place of encounter of "privacies and bodies", in order to permit the play of vital energies, while avoiding concealment and camouflage, so that it faithfully reflects the state and the scope of established conventions as well as their contingency. Public art, he insists, far from celebrating and enshrining customs, has to steer clear of any conditioning of behaviours. It will therefore tend to be subsumed and even vanish in objectual terms, confining itself to "putting into practice certain technical actions and skills", which in the event means simply "redesigning by means of apparently unnecessary operations".

Having come this far, perhaps I ought to remind the reader that the global and interactive idea of landscape as a configurative key has been present



*World in Your Bones, 1998*

in this essay from the outset, because I firmly believe that it effectively underlies Acconci's configurative approach and that of many other artists of his generation, right from the beginnings of their creative careers in the late sixties. If I have called this section "inevitable convergence" it is because after the various expansive inflections I have attempted to detail here, Acconci ends up configuring in the very heart of the most genuine expression of that innovative concept of landscape that is the city and in addition, because I am convinced it could not been any other way. However, given that the seeds of this transformation in the modes of configuring were disseminated and took root just when enlightened modernity was being called into question in its entirety, we have to ask ourselves if today, almost thirty years after it began to bear its first fruits, it is still a valid approach to artistic creation, now that we are fully immersed in the digital age and the issue of privacies has to be redefined in the context of global computer networks.

In relation to this, it is worth noting right at the outset that the virtuality of information was already included in the new concept of landscape by way of language and culture in general, given the indispensable linguistic validation of reality and the consequent metaphorical adherences of things so often invoked in this text. At the same time, science has been telling us for quite a while now that matter, energy and information are practically the same thing and are bound together by entropic flows and explosions. Thus the revolution of IT networks must be seen as a technically advanced form of a phenomenon already present in other technological media, although perhaps more significant on account of its universality and its possible perverse effects in terms of alienation. We should not forget that the idea of interactive landscape and thus its configurative consequences in public art initially emerged as a response to the alienation caused by the acceptance of a type of self-referential art isolated from both the audience and the environment. This alienation evidenced itself in terms of an absence of vital and sensory experience. It seems quite evident that the interconnection of countless domestic micro-computers causes a similar and probably more severe loss, so that public art within the core of the landscapist loop continues to be an appropriate creative attitude; even more so, indeed, than in the past. Acconci is very much aware of this and notes that public art serves to manifest the dramatic contradiction between the individual's natural psychosomatic proactivity and the enforced sensory passivity of his or her ever more pervasive virtual life, in that the public space invites us to appreciate genuine change, while electronic virtuality superimposes spaces and annuls historical time. Nevertheless, interactive



public art is not reactionary because it draws on IT virtuality, in the same way that it draws on books, films and television, although in any case "it starts where they leave off". For that reason Acconci sees it as "the breath of the world" and "the great hope of hopeful thought".

Appreciation of time, exposed privacy and play of conventions come together in a stable balance and a careful configurative economy when Acconci intervenes in public leisure spaces. In *Floor Clock* (1989), for example, he inserted an enormous clock in a paved square which thus served as its face. The numbers were in the form of benches, constructed of white-painted concrete. The hands of the clock were of black steel, and the minute-hand reached half way across each bench, so that every sixty minutes the people sitting there had to stand up. *Project for a Playing Field* (1988) is a children's play park in a clearing in a wood. A series of replicas of an empty house are arranged in a great circle, and these are sunk into the ground, forwards or backwards, according to the side, until they are level with the ground. On the low roof of the central house there is a clock which is reflected in a vertical mirror and thus shows time going backwards, "towards childhood". In *Personal Island* (1992) a rowing boat is embedded in the lawn of a seaside park and converted into something half way between a planter with a tree growing out of it and a bench for resting on. Directly opposite, an identical boat floating on the water is inserted into the garden, as if this were a dock. The oars can now be used, and the boat can be rowed out from its mooring place, with its own private island, with tree included, attached to the prow in the form of a circle of grass around the hull.

On other occasions, however, small irregularities and subliminal transgressions become something more aggressive through the agency of decontextualization or redundancy. Thus, *Mobile Linear City* (1991) is a set of telescopic houses made of corrugated steel which can be moved around on a truck to form a town wherever one is wanted. In *School on the Ground* (1995) the façades surrounding the interior patio of a school were projected into it to form paths, benches and flower beds, freeing the pupils from the walls. As a complement to his retrospective at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in Santiago de Compostela in 1996, Acconci suspended a house and a park from the exterior of the museum's structure, complete with domestic appliances, furniture, sanitary fittings and plants (*House up a Building* and *Park up a Building*). The underlying motive here was to provide a shelter or an alternative for those who declined to enter the museum. With a similar purpose in 1993 he remodelled the central hall



BODIES I  
THE BODY IN SPACE

12 PICTURES

May 28, 1969; 9 and 11 p.m.

Performance

The Theater, New York

House lights out, stage lights out.

Starting from stage left, facing the audience and looking through a camera, I step to my right, across the stage.

At each step, I press down the shutter: the flash-cube flashes, the stage lights up, the house lights up.

The performance results in 12 photographs.



BLINKS

November 23, 1969; afternoon

Photo-Piece

Kodak Instamatic 124, b/w film

Greenwich Street, New York

Holding a camera, aimed away from me and ready to shoot,  
while walking a continuous line down a city street.

Try not to blink.

Each time I blink: snap a photo.



TOE-TOUCH

November 23, 1969; early morning

Activity/photos

Kodak Instamatic 124, b/w film

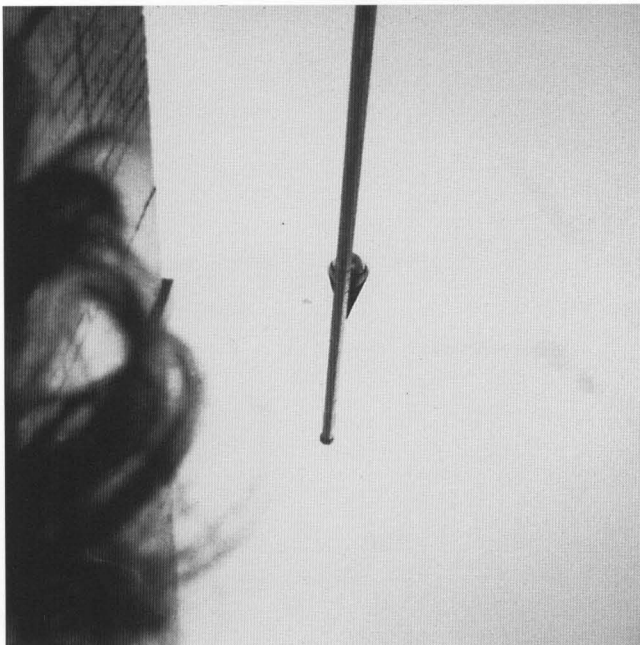
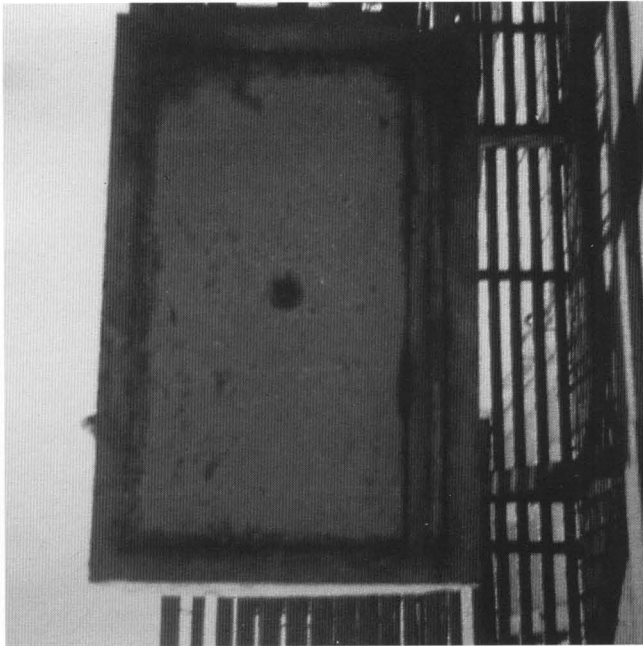
Washington St., between Leroy and Morton, New York

Holding a camera, aimed away from me and ready to shoot,  
while going through the motions of touching my toes.

Raise my hands above my head: snap photo 1.

Bring my hands down to my toes: snap photo 2.





THROW

November 23, 1969; afternoon

Photo-Piece

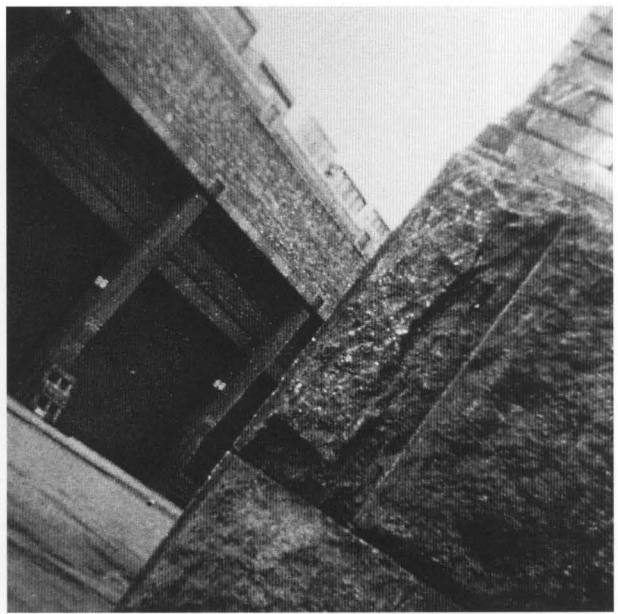
Kodak Instamatic 124, b/w film

Vandam St., between Greenwich and Hudson, New York

Holding a camera, aimed away from me and ready to shoot,  
while going through the motions of throwing a ball.

Reach back as if to throw: snap photo 1.

Throw and follow through: snap photo 2.



## JUMPS

October 12, 1969; afternoon

Photo-Piece

Kodak Instamatic 124, b/w film

Saugerties, New York

Holding a camera, aimed away from me and ready to shoot,  
while making five consecutive broadjumps along a path in the woods.

Jump, hit the ground: snap photo 1.

Jump, hit the ground: snap photo 2.

Jump, hit the ground: snap photo 3.

Jump, hit the ground: snap photo 4.

Jump, hit the ground: snap photo 5.



PERFORMANCE TEST

December 1969

Performance

Emanu-el YM-YWHA, New York (A program of theater-pieces by various artists)

30 minutes

Sitting on a chair, center-stage, facing the audience. The stage-lights and house-lights are on.

I turn my head toward each member of the audience, one by one, from left to right, front to back: I'm staring at each person in turn for thirty seconds each.

(Since there are approximately sixty people in the audience, the performance lasts approximately thirty minutes.)



DRIFTS

November 1970

Jones Beach, New York

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Darío Núñez, Thomas King, Azarakhsh Damood, Rafael Varela, Tako Reyenga]

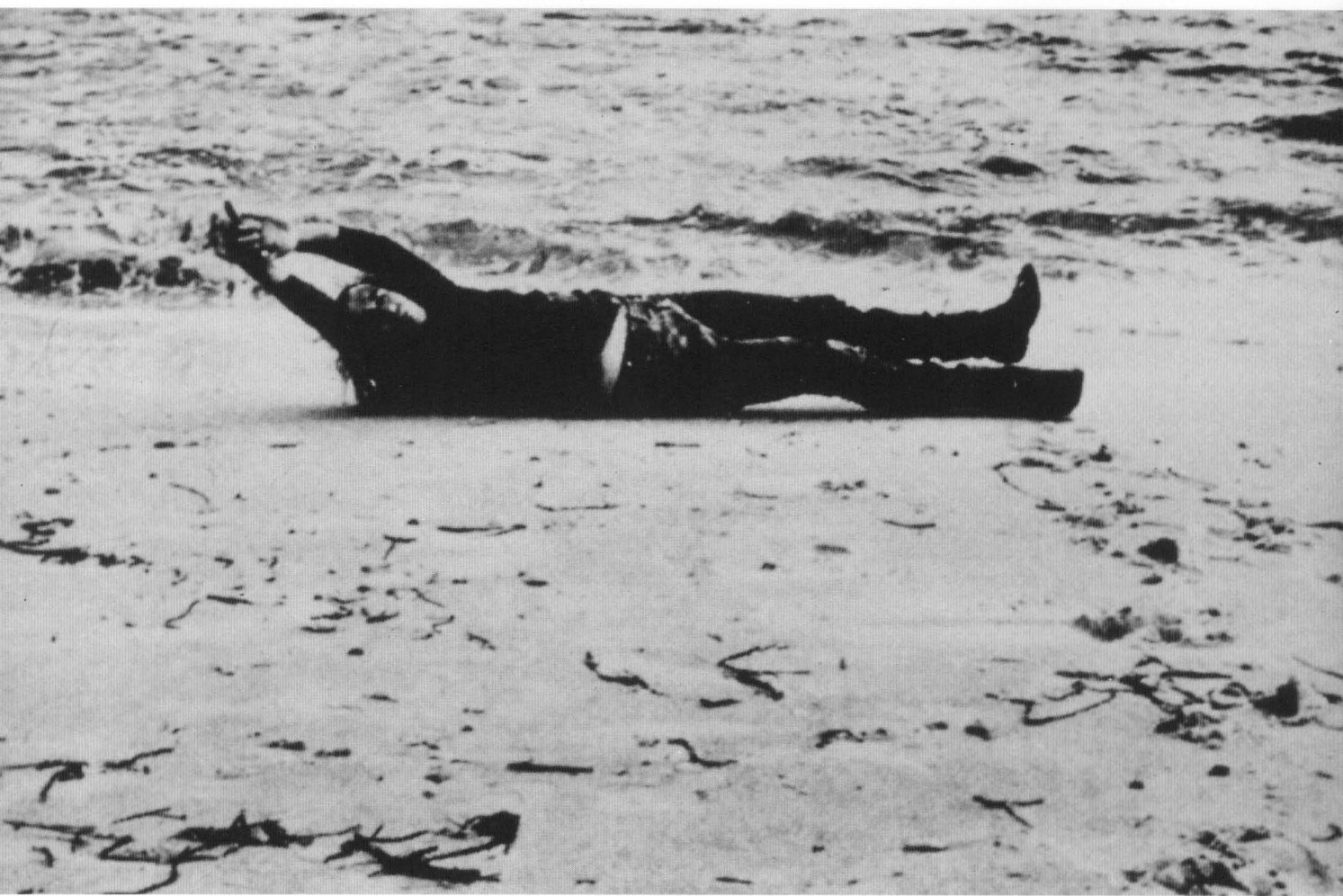
I. Rolling toward the waves as the waves roll toward me; rolling away from the waves as the waves roll away from me.

II. Lying on the beach in one position, as the waves come up to varying positions around me.

III. Using my wet body: shifting around on the sand, letting the sand cling to my body.



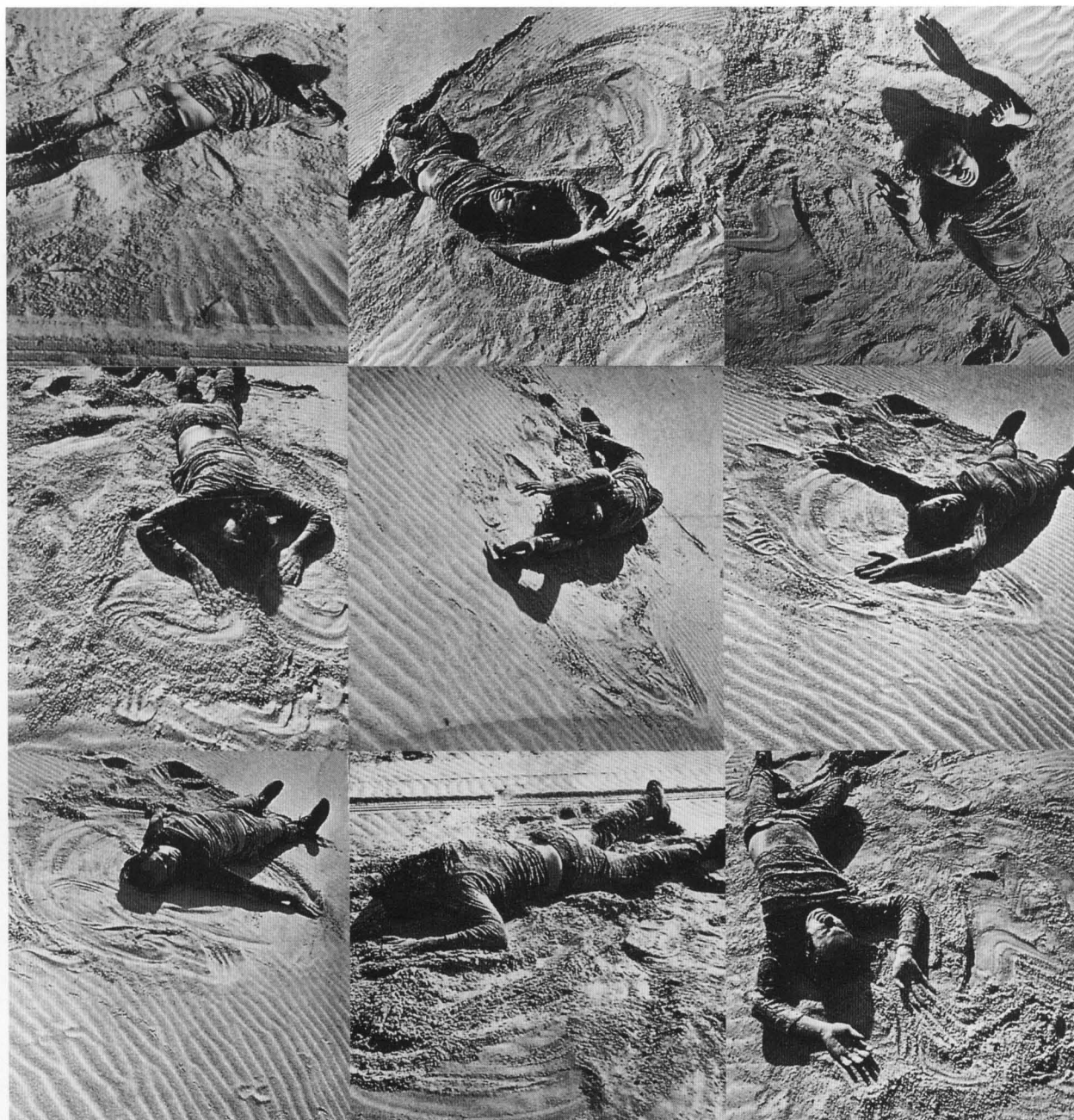












LEARNING PIECE

1970

Performance

Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford

1 hour

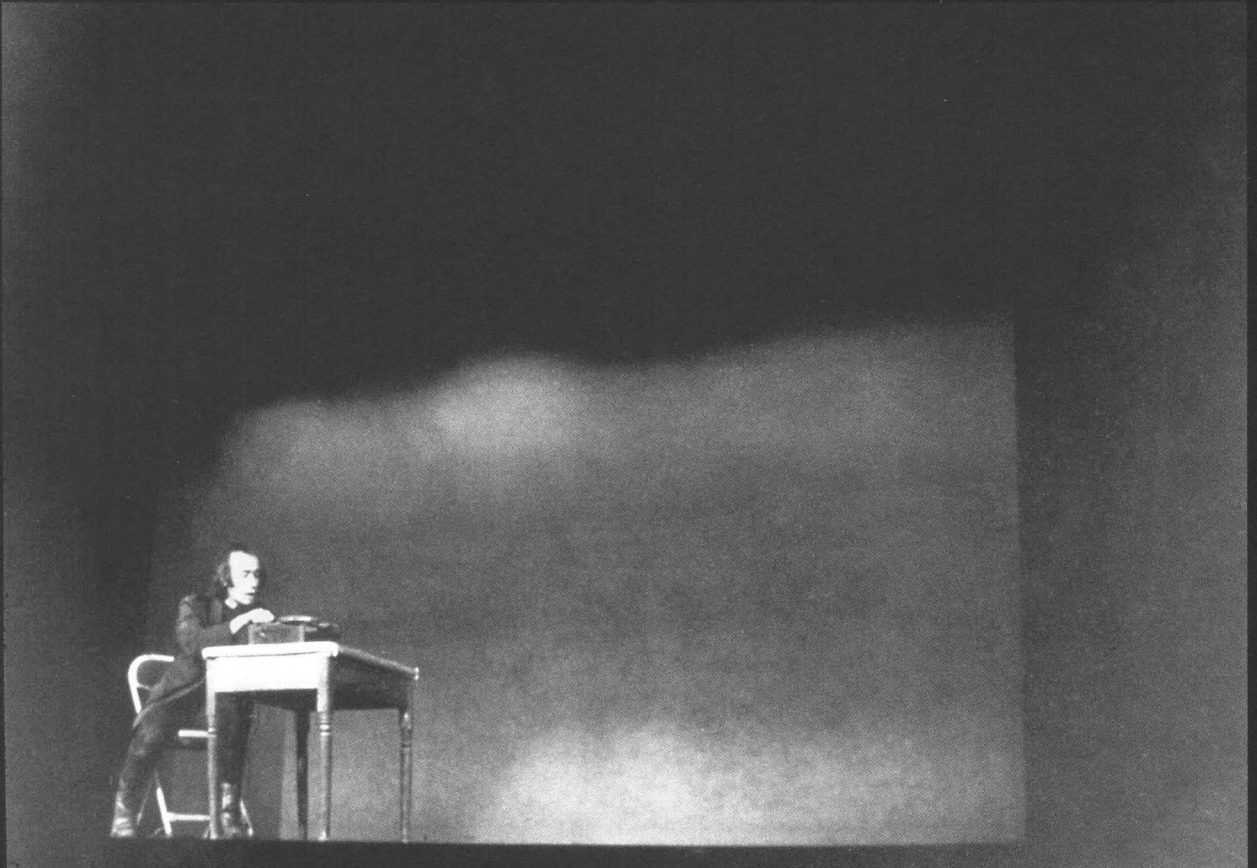
House-lights on, stage-lights on. The condition is that of a rehearsal, a workshop, and not a full-fledged performance. Off to the side of the stage is a table to work at. I'm sitting at the table, in front of a tape recorder:

Playing the first two phrases of a song, Leadbelly's *Black Betty*.

Repeating the two phrases and singing along with them, over and over, until I judge that I've gotten the feel of Leadbelly's performance, I'm into him, with him.

Going back to the beginning of the song and adding two phrases at a time: repeating four phrases, six phrases, eight phrases, and singing with them, over and over, until the entire song is learned.

(The original song is two minutes; the performance lasts one hour.)



FOLLOWING PIECE

"Street Works IV" sponsored by the Architectural League of New York

October 3–25, 1969

Activity

New York, various locations

23 days, varying times each day

Each day I pick out, at random, a person walking in the street.

I follow a different person everyday; I keep following until that person enters a private place (home, office, etc.) where I can't get in.

(The terms of the exhibition, "Street Works IV" were: to do a piece, sometime during the month, that used a street in New York City. FOLLOWING PIECE, potentially, could use all the time allotted and all the space available: I might be following people, all day long, everyday, through all the streets in New York City. In actuality, following episodes ranged from two or three minutes — when someone got into a car and I couldn't grab a taxi, I couldn't follow — to seven or eight hours — when a person went to a restaurant, a movie...)





PROXIMITY PIECE

September 10–November 8, 1970

Activity

"Software". The Jewish Museum, New York

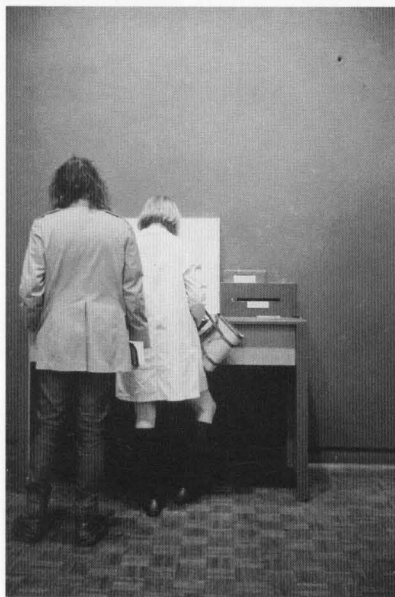
Varying times over 52 days

Standing near a person and intruding on his/her personal space.

During the exhibition, sometime each day, I wander through the museum and pick out, at random, a visitor to one of the exhibits: I'm standing beside that person, or behind, closer than the accustomed distance — I crowd the person until he/she moves away, or until he/she moves me out of the way.

(Attached to the wall, in the midst of the other exhibits, a 3x5" index-card notes the activity and describes it as above; the card might or not be noticed by a viewer passing by.)

The performance results in 12 photographs.



### 35 APPROACHES

October–November 1970

Installation/Activity

"Recorded Activities", Moore College of Art, Philadelphia

4 x 3 x 1'; 35 days

A shelf on the wall of the exhibition area.

I send a letter everyday to the gallery; each day's letter is placed on the shelf.

Each letter, typewritten, is dated; each letter addresses a different person, a specific possible visitor to the gallery: "You in the yellow shirt"... "You in the blue sneakers"... "You in the red skirt"...

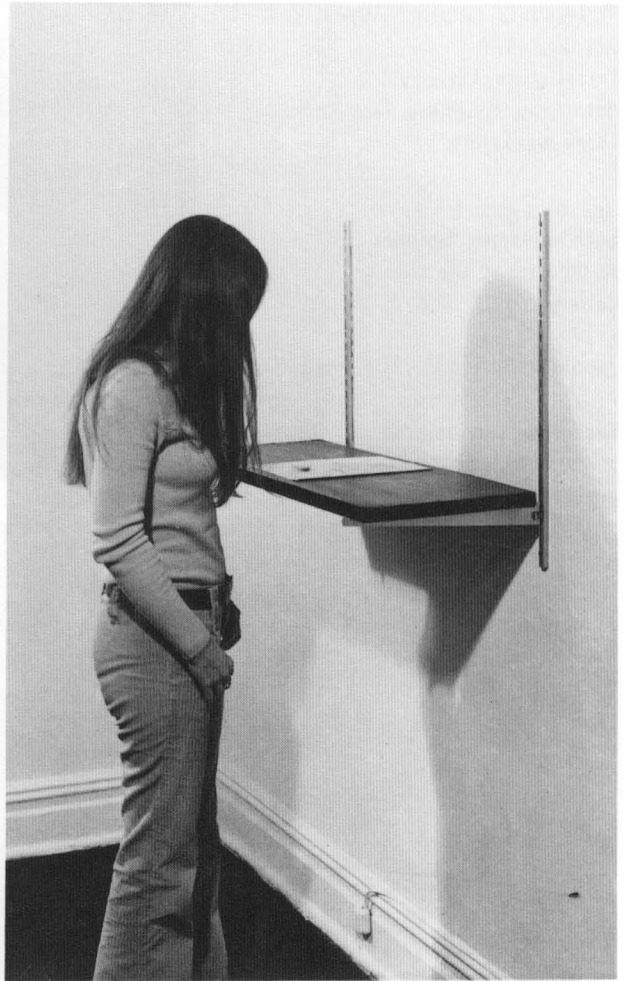
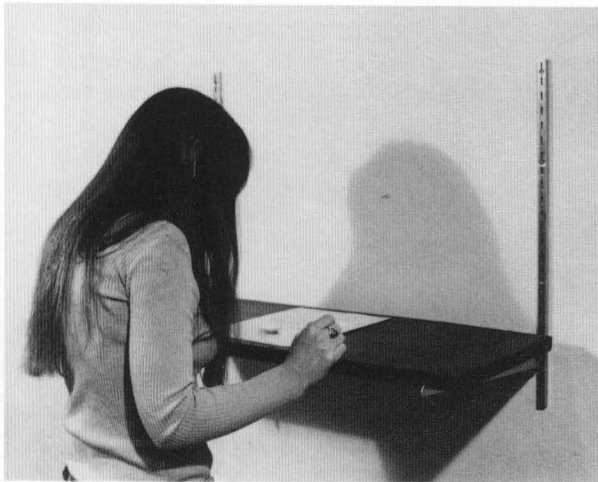
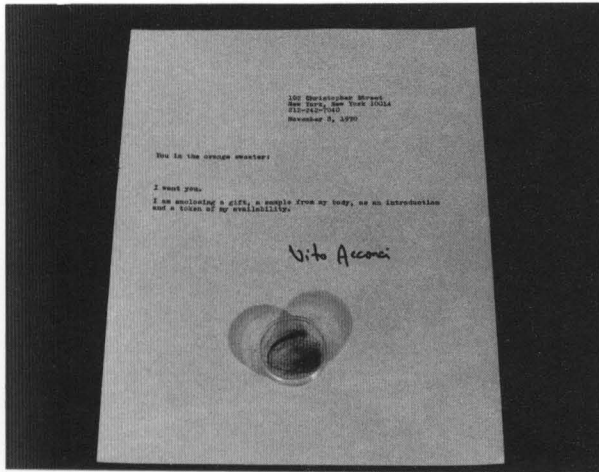
The letter reads:

"I want you.

I am enclosing a gift, a sample from my body, as an introduction and a token of my availability."

The letter is signed by me and includes, stuck to the bottom of the page, a small circular plastic container that encloses material from my body (hair, fingernail clippings, saliva, blood, semen...)

If the letter isn't taken by the end of the day, it's replaced, the next day, with the next letter.



ROOM PIECE (ROOM SITUATION: A SITUATION USING ROOM)

January 1970

Installation/Activity

Gain Ground Gallery, New York

Three weekends, varying times each day; variable dimensions

Each weekend, the movable contents of one room in my apartment (downtown, at 102 Christopher Street) are re-located at the gallery (uptown, at 246 West 80th Street). The contents are left in boxes and stored at the gallery.

January 10, 11: kitchen; January 17, 18: living-room/bedroom & bathroom; January 24, 25: workroom.

Each weekend, my living space extends for eighty blocks, between apartment and gallery. Whenever I need something that's stored at the gallery, I go uptown to get it, bring it back to my apartment where I can use it, and return it to the gallery when I've finished with it.

At Gain Ground, a checklist on the wall defines my "extended apartment" by noting my daily activity between its two farthest points. The checklist notes the object taken, the times of pick-up and return, the routes and means of transportation.

During the final weekend, certain boxes are marked "X". A wall label announces that these boxes may be stolen from.



SERVICE AREA

June–September 1970

Installation/Activity

"Information", Museum of Modern Art, New York

6 x 3 x 3'; 3 months, varying days, varying times each day

During the exhibition, my mail is forwarded by the post office to the museum. My space in the museum functions as my mailbox.

Whenever I need mail, want mail, I go to the museum to get it.

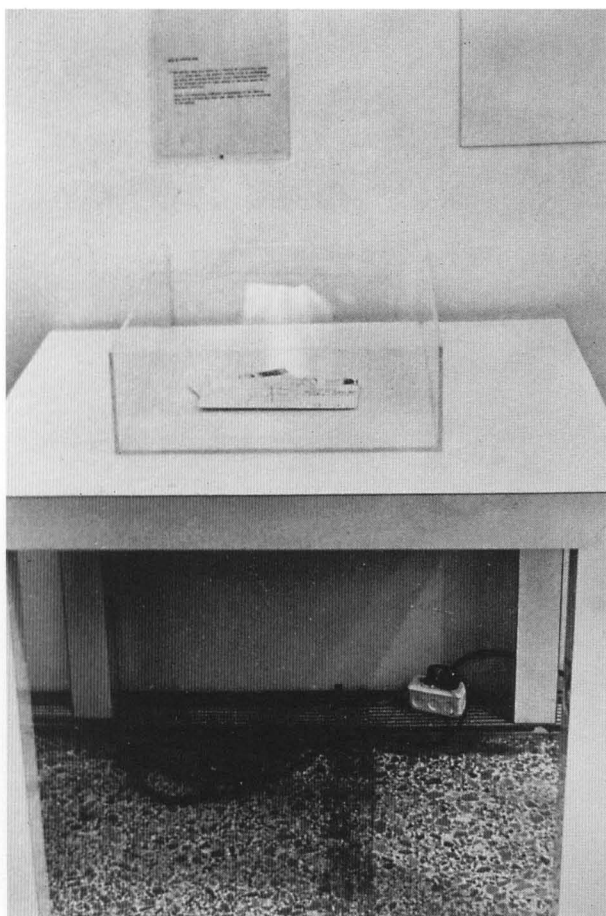
Accessibility (availability) of person: artist on exhibit, required to act because of everyday living, wherever he/she may happen to be at the time.

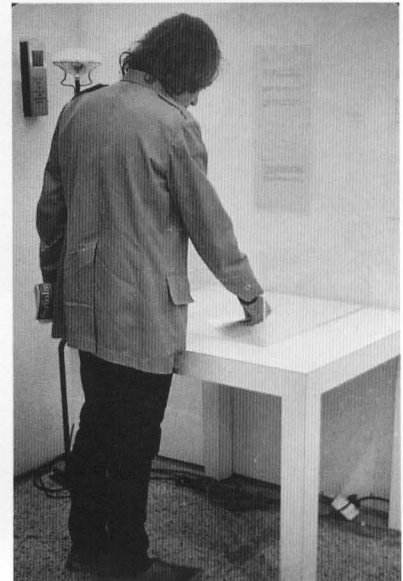
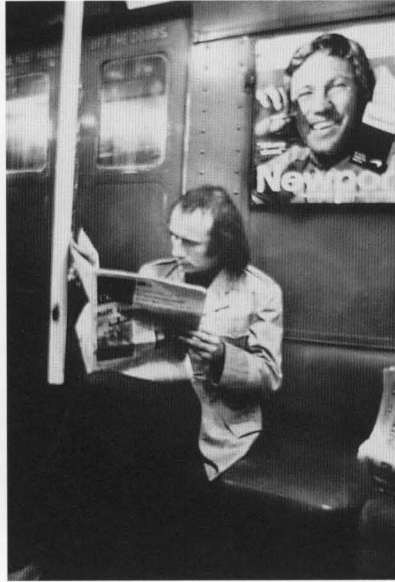
Performer as a producer, going from step to step (linear). Performer as consumer, with agencies converging on the performer (radial).

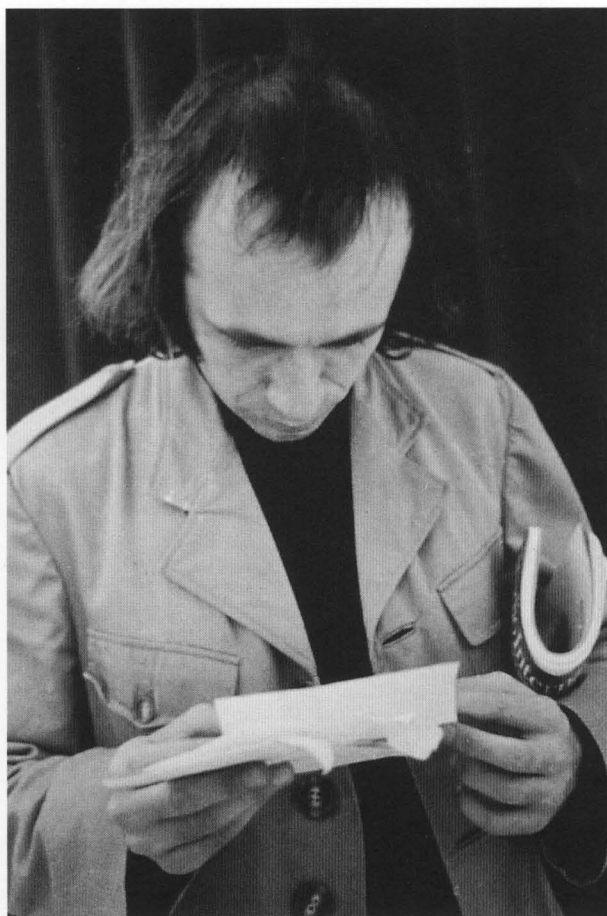
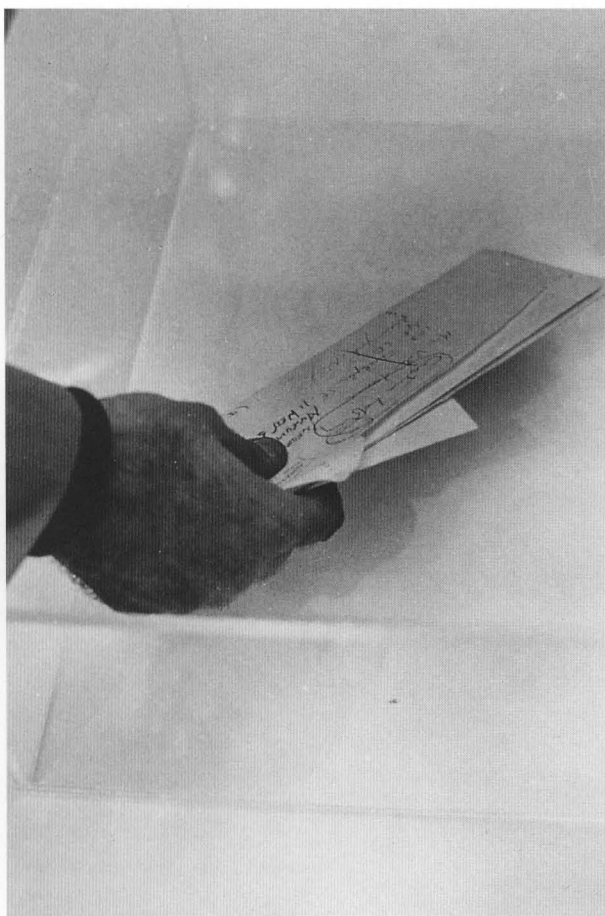
Performance as channel, finding the pathway of a change by removing one station at a time and checking whether the changes persist in the other stations.

What is in place at the museum is "out of place" (the mail doesn't belong there, it's there only so that it won't be there in the future, after I pick it up).









SECOND HAND

January 1971

Performance

Terry Fox exhibition, Reese Palley Gallery, New York

9 x 9 x 9'; 1 hour

An evening of three simultaneous performances (Terry Fox, Dennis Oppenheim, Vito Acconci), each in a separate alcove designed by Fox: in each alcove, a 1,000-watt light-bulb hangs down from the ceiling, four feet above a square of canvas that covers the floor.

A clock on the rear wall, two feet below the ceiling and behind the cord of the light-bulb.

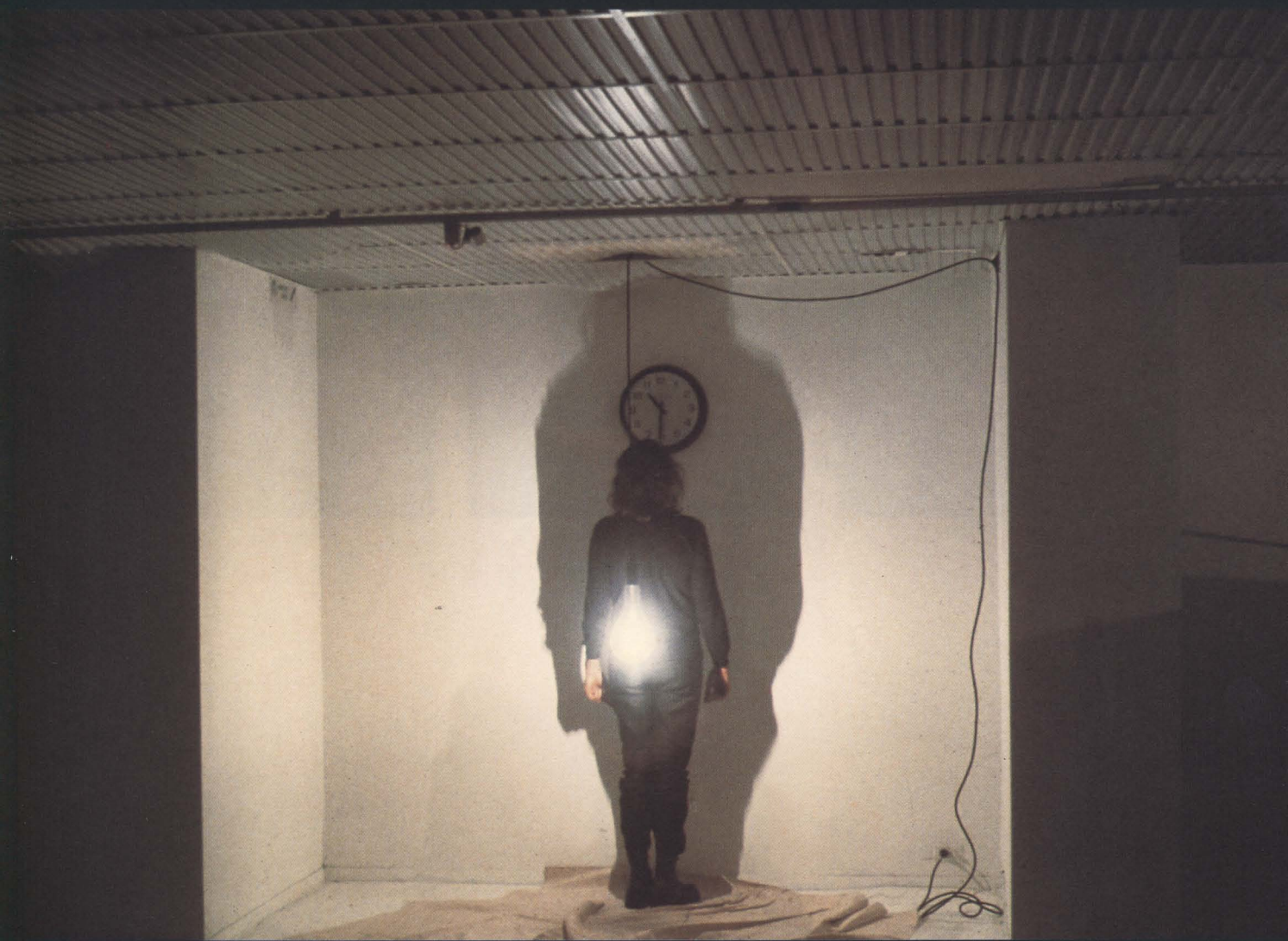
I'm walking in a circle, around the light-bulb, while staring at the clock: I'm following the second hand of the clock, repeating its movement around the light-bulb.











STEP PIECE (STEPS: STEPPING-OFF PLACE)

[February, April, July, November] 1970

Activity/Performance

Apartment 6B, 102 Christopher Street, New York

4 months; varying times each day

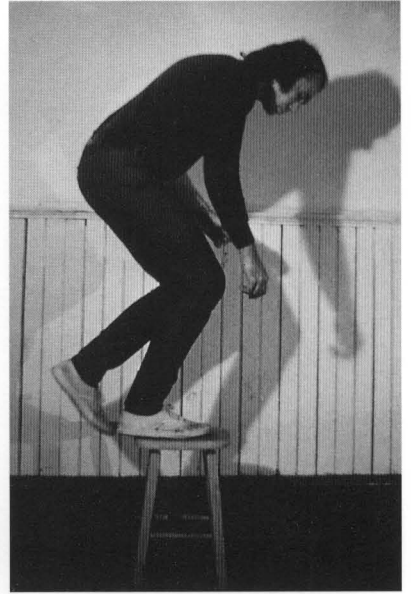
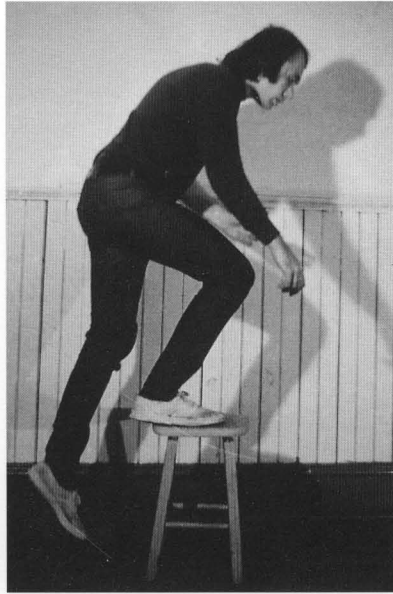
An 18-inch stool is set up in my apartment and used as a step.

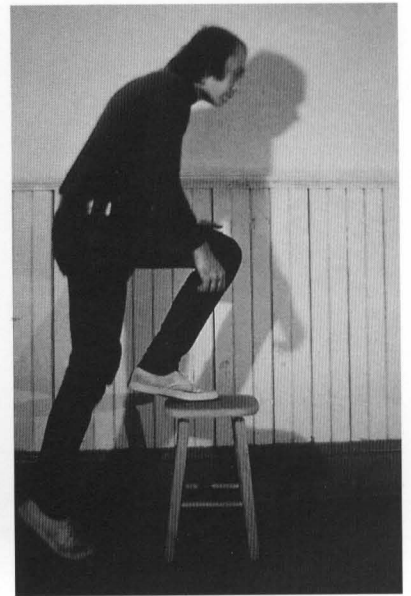
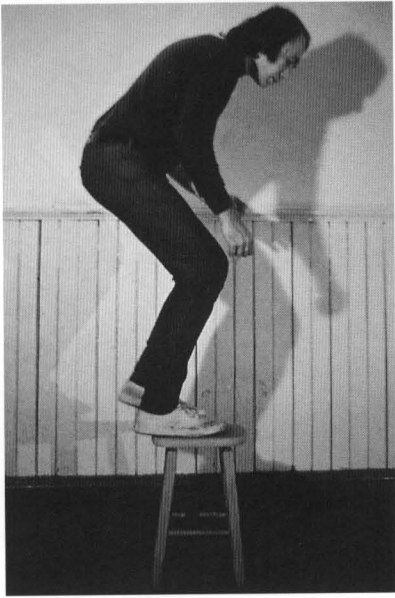
Each morning, during the designated months, I step up and down the stool at the rate of 30 steps a minute. Each day, I step up and down until I can't go on and I'm forced to stop.

Improvement, and the ability to sustain improvement, is put to the test: after the first month's activity, there's a one-month lay-off, then a two-month lay-off, then a three-month lay-off.

(Announcements are sent out, inviting the public to come see the activity, in my apartment, any day during the designated months. At the end of each month's activity, a progress-report is sent out to the public.)







BODIES II  
THE SPACE OF THE BODY

RUBBING PIECE

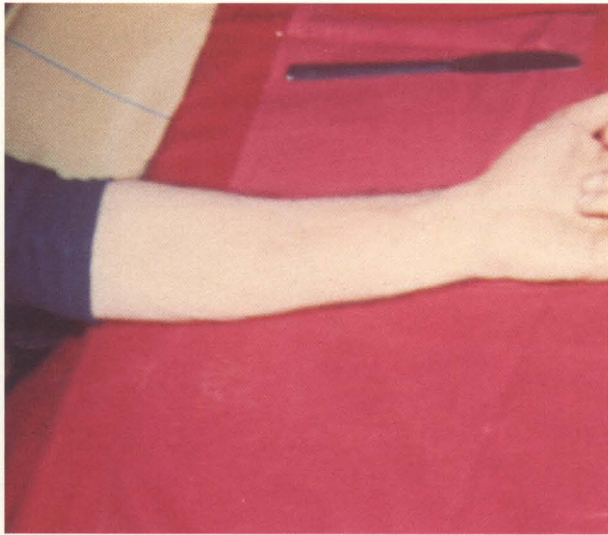
May 1970

Max's Kansas City Restaurant, New York

One hour on a Saturday afternoon

A program of simultaneous live performances, by ten artists, in the middle of ordinary restaurant activity.

I sit alone at a booth in the restaurant: My left sleeve is rolled up, my left forearm lies stretched out on the table — with my right hand I rub my left forearm, steadily, quickly, for one hour without stopping — my skin turns red, gradually I've developed a sore.







BLINDFOLDED CATCHING

June 1970

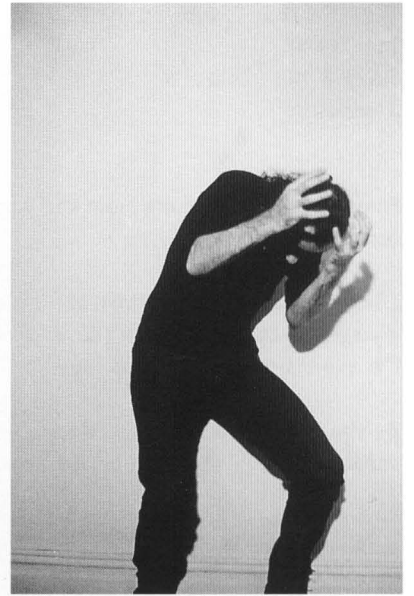
Super-8 film, b/w

3 minutes

Fixed camera shoots me, full-body, standing blindfolded with my back to the wall: from off-screen, rubber balls are thrown at me, one at a time, over and over again...

I'm trying to catch the ball I can't see... I'm raising my arms up in front of my face, I've anticipated when the next ball will be thrown, I'm wrong, my motions are wasted... I'm hit by a ball, my body doubles over, it's too late to protect myself...





SOAP & EYES

June 1970

Super-8 film, color

3 minutes

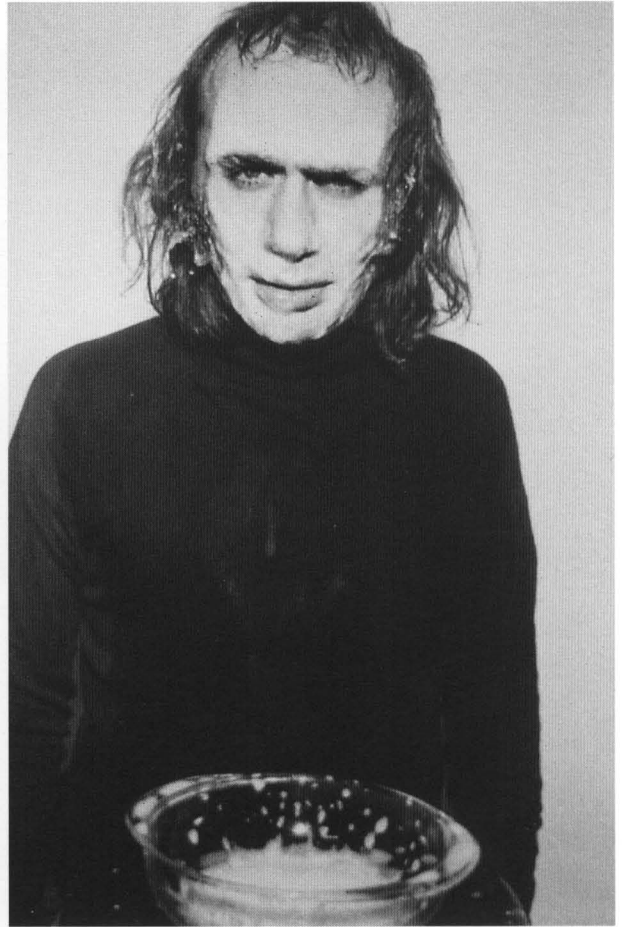
Fixed camera shoots me from the waist up: there's a bowl of soapy water in front of me, I'm staring into the camera lens.

I lift the bowl up and throw the soapy water onto my face, into my eyes: I'm blinded, I can't see, I can't open my eyes, I can't look into the camera... I'm blinking, I'm working the soap out of my eyes, I don't use my hands, I'm exercising my eyes and my eye-lids...

By the end of the film, I'm staring into the camera again, I've worked myself back to my original position, I'm staring through the soap on my face.







TRADEMARKS

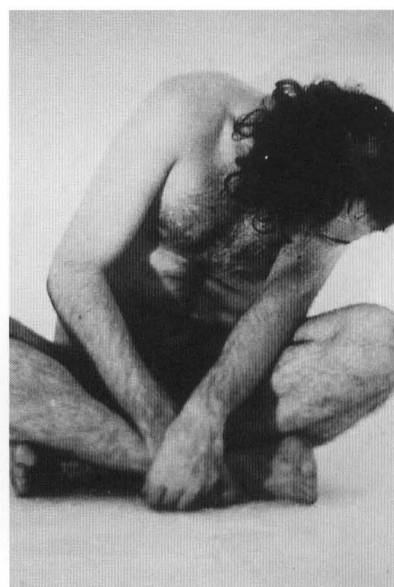
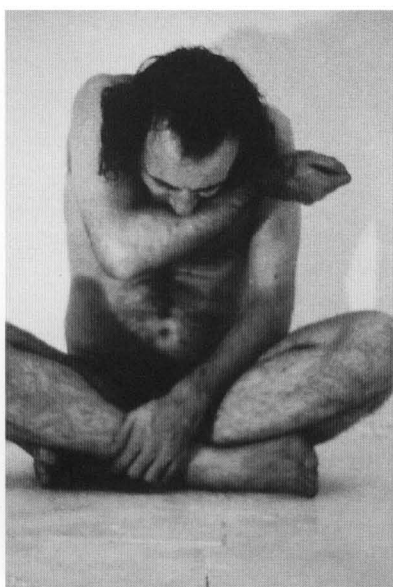
September 1970

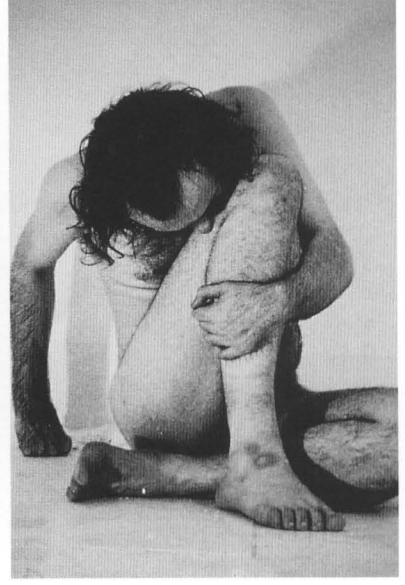
Photographed Activity/Ink-prints

Photos by Bill Beckley

Sitting naked on the floor, and biting myself: Biting as many parts of my body as my mouth can reach.

Printers' ink is applied to each bite; bite-prints are stamped, like finger-prints.









PASSES

1971

Videotape (face, hand, distance)

20 minutes

Kathy Dillon

1. Extending my arm forward, full-length, in front of me; passing my hand up and down, and back and forth, in front of my face.
2. Gradually pulling in my arm; each time, repeating the up-and-down, back-and-forth motion.
3. The tape ends when my arm has been pulled in so far that, when my hand passes up and down and back and forth across my face, it pushes into my skin.

Room to move around in: breathing space: system of possible movements transmitted from the body to the environment.

Making a boundary: forming the space around the body: forming a body-image, an aura, around the body.

Containing space: taking in the space around the body and making it part of an extended body.

Body haunting space: space haunting the body (the "pointer" comes back and defaces the face, changes the body).



CONVERSIONS. PART I (LIGHT, REFLECTION, SELF-CONTROL)

Summer 1971

Super-8 film, b/w

48 minutes

Camera: Kathy Dillon

The screen is dark. A light appears on the screen, it's a candle that I'm moving over the front of my body: I'm shot from the waist up, naked from the waist up — the candle lights the film, the candle lights up different parts of my body.

When I draw the candle near to one breast, the camera zooms in: the flame touches the hair on my breast, I'm using the candle to burn off the hair.

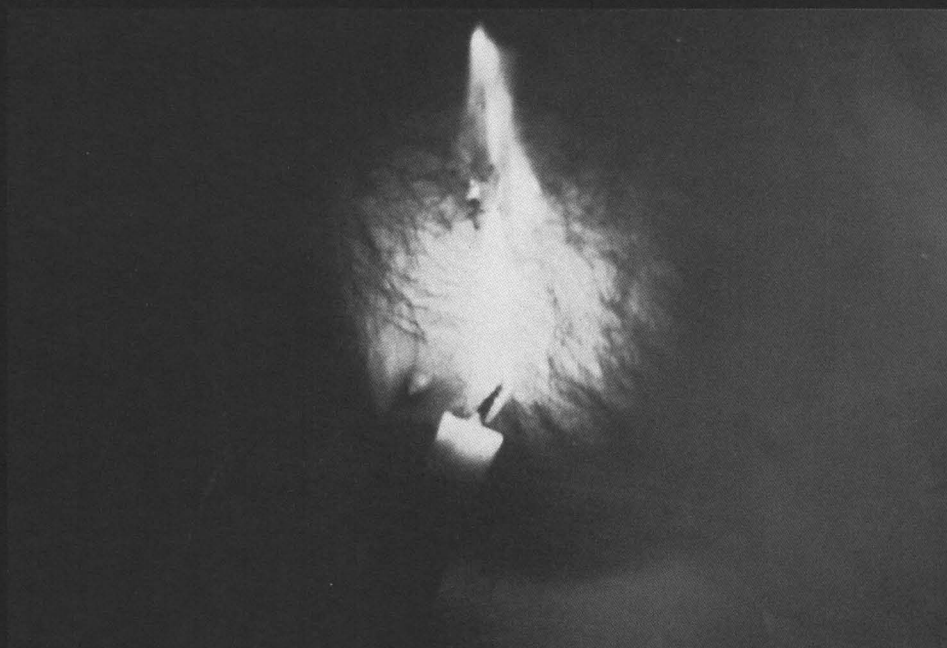
Once the breast is hairless, I pull at my breast, I'm trying to make my breast look like a female breast. (The camera zooms out and shoots my body in profile.)

Since the pulling is futile, since there's no change in the look of my breast, I try again, and move the candle over to my other breast: I use the candle again here to burn the hair off.

Now that both breasts are hairless, I put the candle down in front of me and use both hands to pull at my breasts together: the camera zooms out and shoots me frontally, I'm pulling my breasts out toward the camera.









CONVERSIONS. PART II (INSISTENCE, ADAPTATION, GROUNDWORK, DISPLAY)

Summer 1971

Super-8 film, b/w

18 minutes

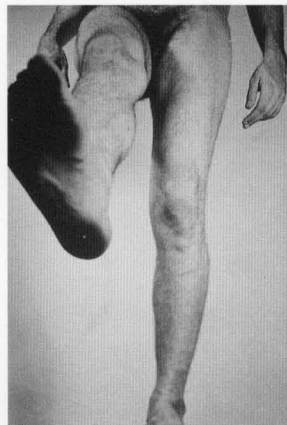
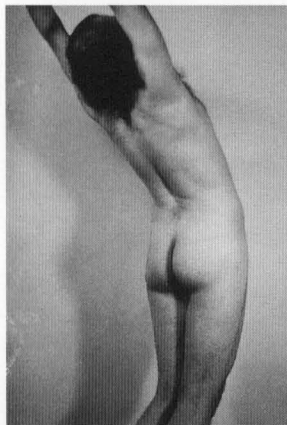
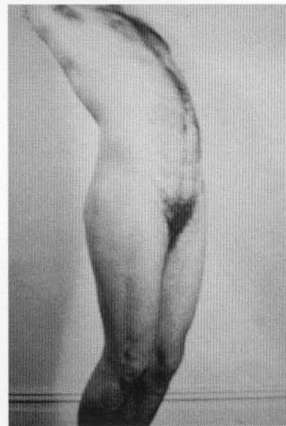
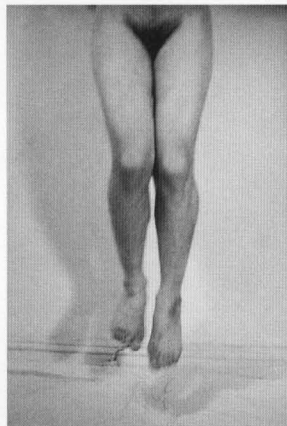
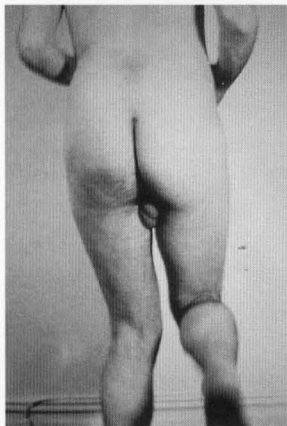
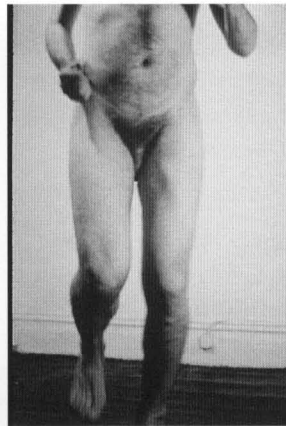
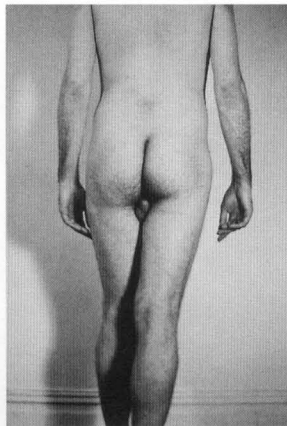
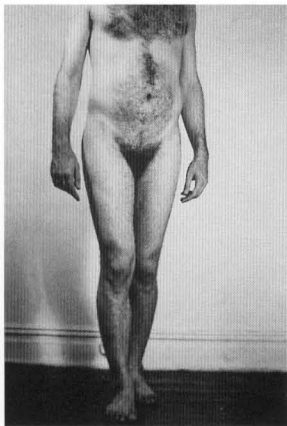
Camera: Kathy Dillon

The camera is fixed as I move away from it and toward it, into it and out of it.

Naked, I'm practising a new body: the camera shoots me from the head down, I'm keeping my penis confined between my legs, my body looks as if it has a vagina...

I'm exercising my new body: six 3-minute exercises — walking, running, stretching, kicking, jumping, sitting down and sitting back up. (My penis slips out... I push it back in... the game is up when I turn around and my testicles are exposed from behind... I move towards the camera again and show my vagina...)





CONVERSIONS. PART III (ASOCIATION, ASSISTANCE, DEPENDENCE)

Fall 1971

Super-8 film, b/w

6 minutes

Second participant: Kathy Dillon. Camera: Doug Waterman

Two naked bodies on the screen: we're all bodies — my head is out off by the film frame, her face is lost in my body. The camera jerks around us, zooms in and out, looking for the right shot.

Kathy Dillon, kneeling behind me, takes my penis into her mouth. With my penis confined, with my penis gone, I'm exercising (running in place, kicking, bending, stretching, jumping) — all the while, she's trying to keep my penis, keep my penis lost in her mouth. As the camera moves in front of us, as the camera zooms into my groin, my body has a vagina...



TRAPPINGS

October 1971

Performance

Warehouse, Munchengladbach (A program of simultaneous performances)

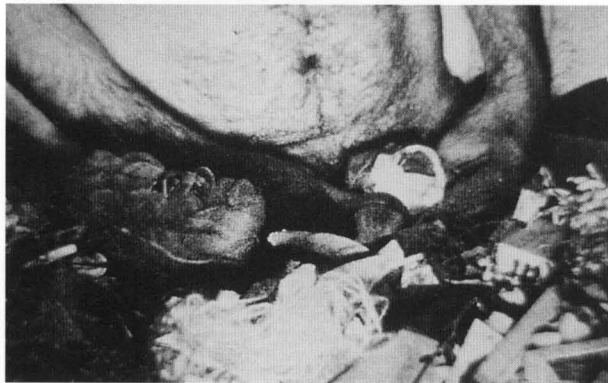
One hour

A corridor lined with stalls, closet-like spaces four feet high and piled up with junk, industrial detritus: shards of wood, scraps of metal, torn-up cardboard, rusty bits of hardware...

Mixed into one stall are imports from elsewhere, from something like a child's world, a young girl's bedroom: foam and fabric, shawls and veils, artificial flowers and leaves, toys and doll's clothes...

Inside the closet, naked, I'm buried up to my visit: I reach into the pile and pick up some wrapping... I'm dressing my penis in doll's clothes, I'm talking to my penis, my penis grows up, my penis has a life of its own...

A viewer walks by and looks down on me, a viewer bends over into the closet to listen.





BODIES III

BODY WITH BODY ("HE" & "SHE")

## PRYINGS

January 1971

Live performance with video; videotape from the performance, b/w, sound

Eisner & Lubin Auditorium, New York University, New York

20 minutes

Second Participant: Kathy Dillon. Camera: Bernadette Mayer

Video monitor center-stage: Kathy and I stand at the front of the audience-area, below the stage, while Bernadette holds a video camera and walks around us.

Kathy's eyes are closed: her goal is to keep her eyes closed — my goal is to force her eyes open.

(Bernadette keeps the camera focused on Kathy's face: Kathy's face: Kathy's face, close-up, appears on-screen throughout the performance.)









SECURITY ZONE

February 1971

Activity

"Pier 18 Show" (the show consisted of photographs of pieces done privately, without an audience)

Pier 18, New York

Second Participant: Lee Jaffee

The piece is designed to affect, improve, an everyday relationship.

The piece is done with a person I have ambiguous feeling about, a person I don't trust.

The two of us are alone at the far end of the pier — open pier, narrow pier, not much room to walk from one side to the other. I'm blindfolded, my hands are tied behind me, my ears are plugged: in my deprived position, I'm forced to have trust — there's only one person here who can stop me from walking off into the water. The piece measures my trust; more than that, it builds up trust. (The question is: will the trust last — does the trust deserve to last — once the piece is over?)



CHANNEL

1971

Performance (earplugs, concentration, "sixth sense", directions)

Eisner and Lubin Auditorium, New York University, New York

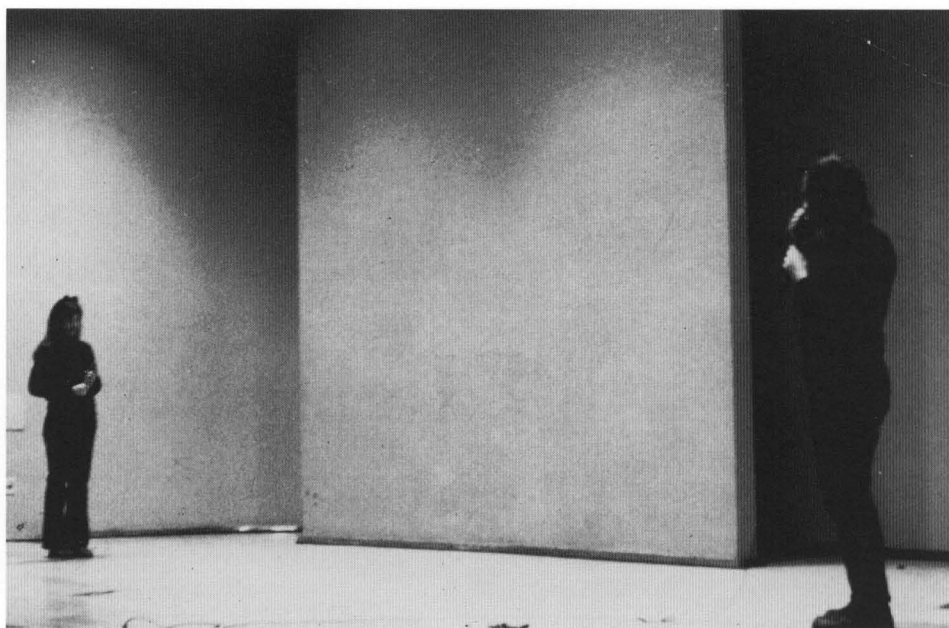
1 hour

Two performers; each has his ears plugged, each has a microphone to speak into. (Each performer cannot hear what the other is saying; the microphones are used so that the speaking performer's intention can be understood by the audience.)

The performers begin the activity at opposite ends of the stage.

1. Performer A whispers into his microphone and directs Performer B to make a particular movement.
2. Performer B concentrates and tries to intuit what Performer A desires. (Performer A, after he has spoken, keeps concentrating on transmitting his direction to Performer B.)
3. If Performer B's move is incorrect, Performer A keeps repeating his direction until Performer B understands it — or until it becomes apparent that Performer B cannot grasp it, at which point Performer A can decide to change his direction.
4. If Performer B's move is correct, it is his turn to direct Performer A to make a particular movement.





PULL

April 1971

Performance; Videotape of the performance

Eisner & Lubin Auditorium, New York University, New York

30 minutes

Second Participant: Kathy Dillon. Camera: Students of New York University Media Department

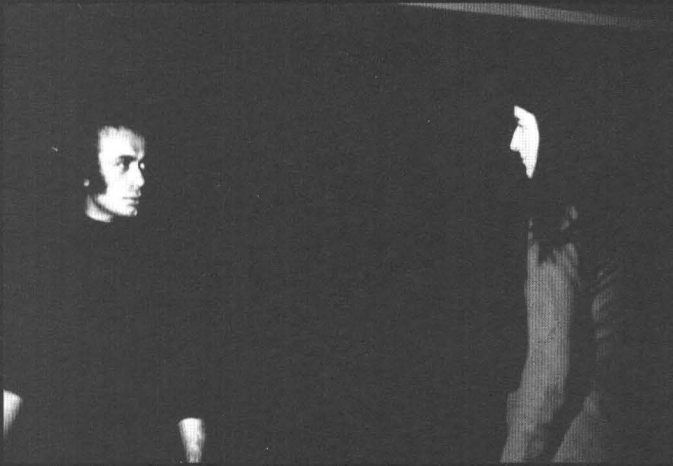
A floor-area 10 feet square, marked off with masking tape and spotlight from above.

Kathy stands in the center; I walk in a circle around her; Kathy rotates in the center of the circle.

Each of us stares at the other; each of us concentrates on holding the other's gaze.

When one of us shifts directions, or changes speed, the other decides whether or not to follow; either of us chooses to control, either chooses to be controlled.





## REMOTE CONTROL

1971

Video Installation

6 x 7 x 2'; 2 simultaneous videotapes, b/w, sound

1 hour

Two video monitors facing each other, three feet apart, the monitors sit on pedestals, as wide and deep as the monitors, four and a half feet high; a viewer can stand between them, turning to look into from one image to the other.

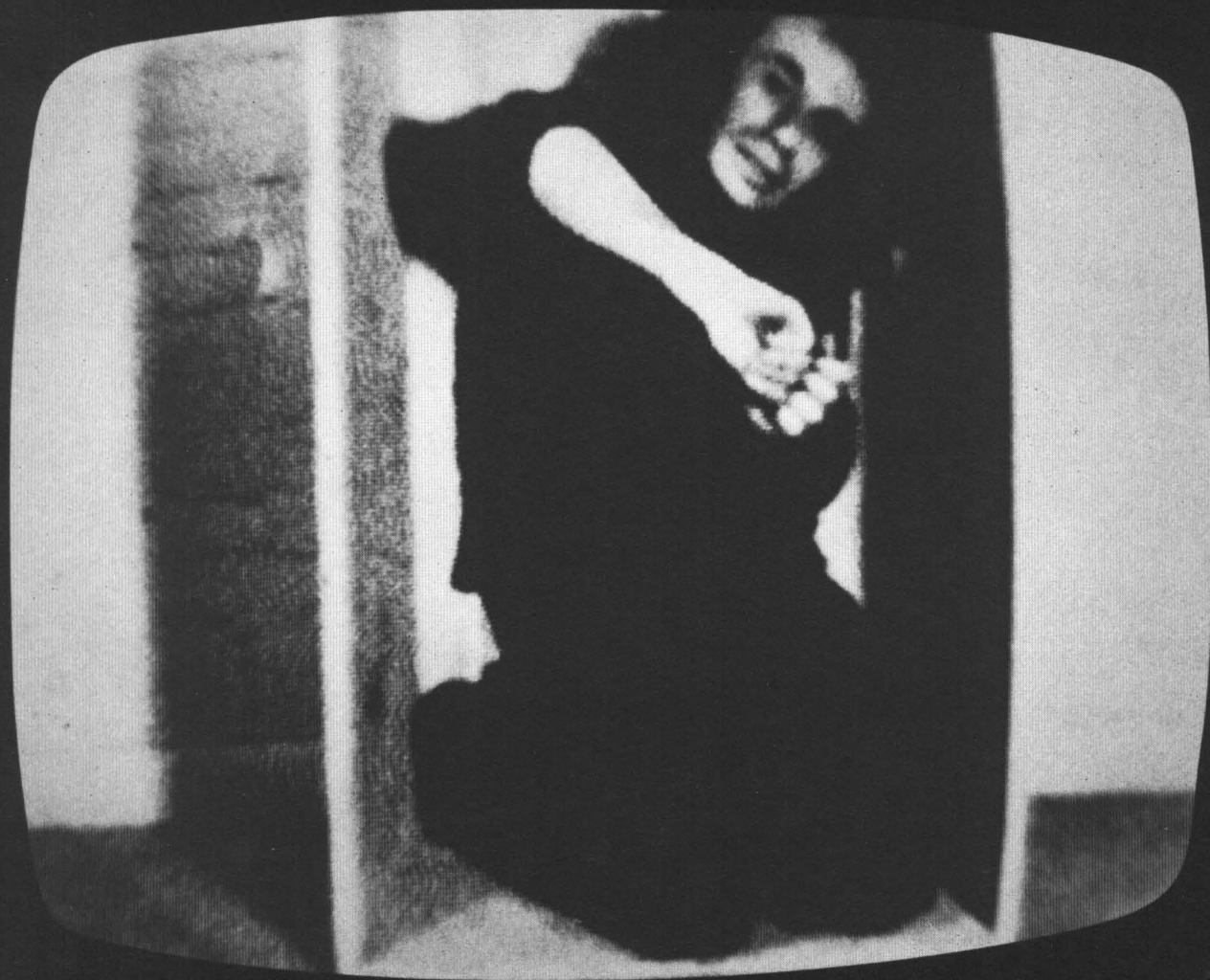
I'm on one tape, on one monitor; Kathy Dillon is on the other. Each of us is crouched inside a wooden box, three feet high by two feet wide by two and a half feet deep. The front of each box is open; we face each other from box to box, from monitor to monitor; next to Kathy is a coil of thick rope, one hundred fifty feet long.

The tapes were recorded in separate rooms: in front of each of us, in each of ours rooms, is a video camera and a monitor — I can see and hear Kathy, while she can see and hear me.

I try to feel Kathy right there in front of me: this isn't just her video image, this is real, I can reach out and touch her — I can prove it, I go through the motions of tying her up, I know what I'm doing, I say what I'm doing: "...I'm bringing the rope down over knees...slow, slow...you're resisting, aren't you?...but now I'm drawing the rope softly, softly, along your skin...you want me to do it, don't you?..."

I'm talking to both of us, to myself as much as to her; I'm talking myself into it: if I'm good enough, if I can convince myself that I'm tying her up, then she'll be hypnotized, she'll tie herself up, all the while believing that she's been tied up by me.

(Things get out of hand; the situation turns into soap-opera: Kathy is giving in to me, out of convenience, I don't believe that she believes it, she's only playing, I say...Kathy fights back...we argue ourselves in and out of our roles...)





BODIES IV  
PERSON-TO-PERSON ("I" & "YOU")

UNTITLED PROJECT FOR PIER 17

March 27–April 24, 1971

Performance

West Street and Park Place, New York

About 25 x 75 x 300'; 29 days, 1 hour each night

An abandoned pier, on the west side of downtown New York. The pier is enclosed, like a warehouse; from the entrance, on the street, it's a long distance, the space of two or three blocks, to the far end of the pier, over water. At night, it's difficult to see where you're walking: here and there, floorboards are missing — precarious piles of rubble crowd in from either side of the clearing through the middle — sections of the ceiling are caving in, the beams are rotten, gaping holes in the walls open out onto the river below.

Every night, I'm at the pier at 1 a.m.; I'm alone — I'm waiting at the far end of the pier, for one hour.

If someone comes out to the pier to meet me, I confess to that person something about me that hasn't been revealed before, something that I'm ashamed of and that under normal circumstances I wouldn't tell a soul, something that — if it were made public — could be used against me.

In exchange for keeping the secret, the visitor can demand something from me: the visitor can blackmail me.

No secret is told more than once; each visitor has sole possession of the information given. None of the meetings are documented by me; visitors, on the other hand, might make use of the information any way they want. A bargain is struck between "you" and "me": if you agree to keep silent, then I'll agree to do whatever you ask of me.

(The project is announced, at John Gibson Gallery, by a typewritten statement on the wall, accompanied by photos of the deserted pier; the project is concurrent with my show at the gallery. The project keeps being announced by rumor, and by reportage in newspapers.)











CLAIM

1971

Performance (basement, crow-bar, lead-pipe, blindfold)

3 hours

A two-level loft.

On the ground floor, next to the door that leads downstairs to the basement, a video monitor shows my activity below. The monitor functions as an announcement, or a warning: seeing and hearing what's going on downstairs, the viewer decides whether or not to open the door.

In the basement, I'm seated on a chair at the foot of the stairs: I'm blindfolded, I have in my hands two lead pipes and a crowbar. I'm talking, without stopping: the talk is addressed to myself, the talk is designed as self-hypnotism, I'm talking myself into an obsession that the basement is mine. The talk leads to action: if I hear someone walking down the stairs, I swing my lead pipe, my crowbar, out in front of me — I claim my space.









## CROSS-FRONTS

Summer 1972

Performance (Performance Arena)

Documenta V, Kassel

Performance for three weeks, twice a day, two hours each time

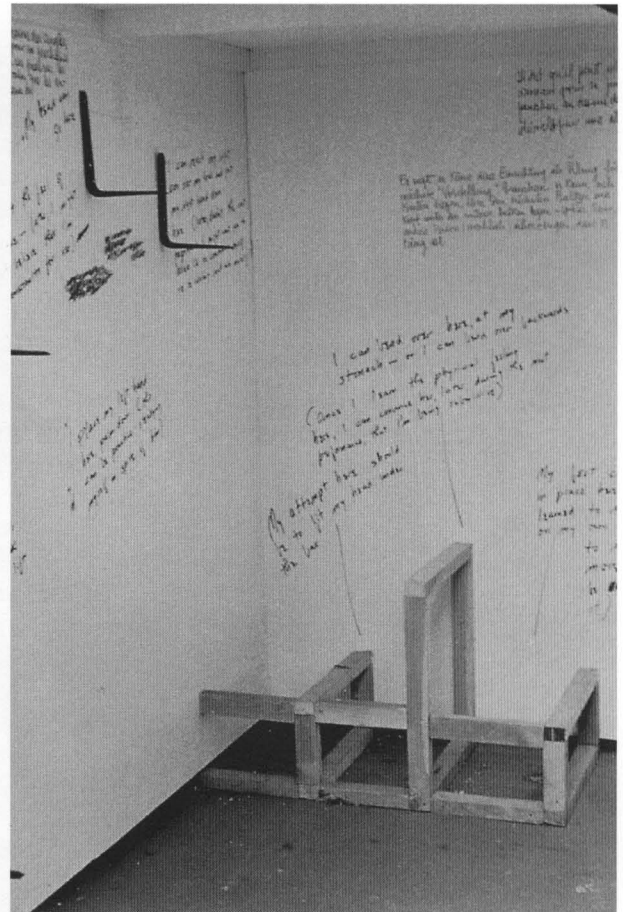
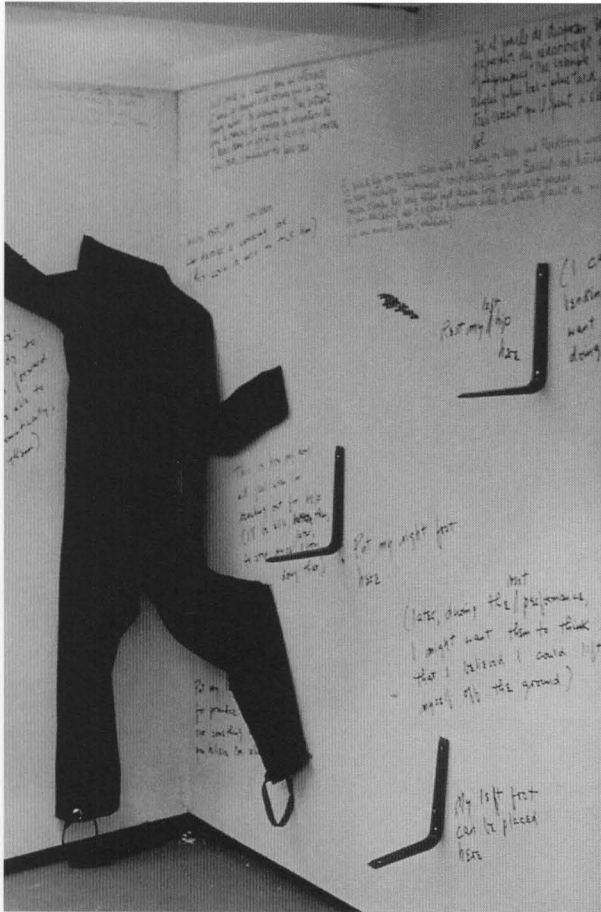
Around the performance-area are four support rooms. The first three are pre-performance rooms:

**FITTING ROOMS I & II:** On either side of the corridor leading to the performance-area, a narrow space is cut off, closed off by a curtain. Each space is a kind of rehearsal room: these a place where I can practise, work my body into the performance (in turn, this is a place where you, the viewer, can rehearse, get into, my state of mind). Fitting Room I functions as a kind of body-space: a one-piece suit in one corner, hanging on the wall — body brackets, supports, on the middle wall. These are body positions that I can fit myself into. Whereas Fitting Room I deals with the body as a whole figures, Fitting Room II provides a close-up: the wall is lined with rubber gloves (I can fit my hand into them, change my gestures) — there are masks, turned facing the wall, objects I can hook my face onto (I can try out new features here, "lose face", change face). In each room, my handwriting scrawls out suggestions for possible uses: "My left foot can be placed here — later, during the next performance, I might want them to think I can lift myself off the ground..."

**SOUND BASE:** A closed room just outside the performance area. The room is dark; the room is so small that a soft cushion makes up the entire floor. There's an audiotape: I'm trying out sounds tying them to emotions — once the sound is made, I can change my feelings. "From this sound, I might make statements about affection: aaaaaaaaaaaaah...From sound that sound, as it turned out, I might make statements about need..."

The last support room is a post-performance room, a small alcove under a stairway, just behind the performance-area:

**COMPENSATION/DISPLACEMENT AREA:** There are two adjacent zones, each formed by a circle of white bricks. The first zone is visible from the outside; ten clay balls are mixed in with the bricks: my handwriting scrawls a note on the wall — "I can sit here and take out on the clay what I couldn't take out on him, during my last performance..." The second zone is hidden around the corner, under the stairs; a tiny gold ball hangs down from underneath the staircase: "I can stare at this and pull myself together...I can outstare this where I couldn't outstare you..."



The performance-area itself is a space in the tower, about eighteen feet square: the space is church-like — domed ceiling, rough-textured brick walls, recessed window, a space for the gargoyles: CROSS-FRONTs.

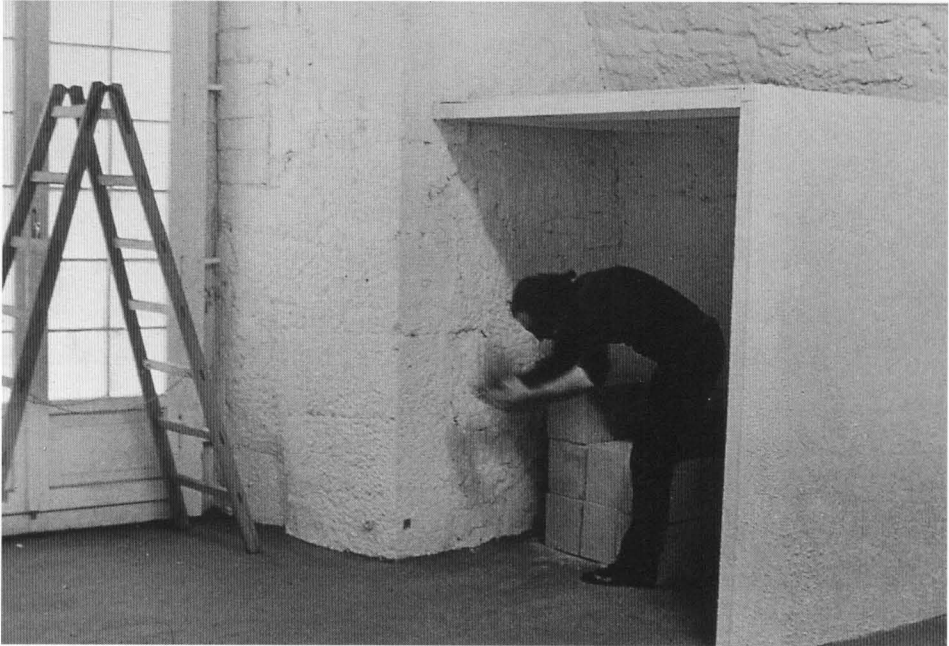
The room is considered in terms of possible sizes, shapes: high, low, wide, bent, broken. Five niches are built around the edge of the room: each niche contains props that force me to change position; each position shapes me into a different role. 1.Ladder in window recess (I can climb up here: giant). 2.Brushwood on the ceiling, lowering an already low ceiling (I have to kneel down, crouch, in order to fit in here: dwarf). 3.Pillows sprawled over the floor (I can sink in here, spread myself out). 4.Wood beams propped diagonally from one side to the other (to get in here I have to lean over, bend down). 5.Cinder blocks almost blocking the niche (I can prop my leg up, "lose" my leg here: one-legged man).

There's a constant tape loop, the sound coming from near the entrance: my voice in English (I address myself) while foreign voices translate and address me in the third person (I hear voices all around me): "Acconci, don't let your attention wander...think of yourself in terms of size and shape...break yourself apart...put the parts in different order...react to yourself...fight with yourself...bring yourself together..."

I'm blindfolded; viewers are standing around, we share the space, I grope my way through viewers, along the walls, into a niche: I work myself into the role there, talk myself into it (I'm in the fat man's niche, sinking into the pillows, mumbling: "...I can be alone here, away from the rest of them...falling...fall away, I don't have to think of anything here...") — but I can't sustain it, my mind is on something else, some other role — so I go over to that niche, take a position, react to myself as I was in the first niche, I'm in one role playing to myself in another role (I'm in the one-legged man's niche, I'm leaning over toward the fat man's niche, I'm jumping toward it: "...I won't let you stay alone...I need you...") — but, again, this role brings up a reaction, I have to be somewhere else, things are more complicated than I thought (so I go over to the giant's niche, I climb the ladder and kick at the one-legged man: "...It's too late...I'll knock the legs out from under you..."). All the while, viewers are in the same space I'm in: they're "in mind", in the middle of the criss-crossings I make across the room, they interfere with my passage and have some effect on changing my mind.









SEEDBED

January 1972

Performance/Installation

Sonnabend Gallery, New York

9 days, 8 hours a day, during a 3-week exhibition; wood ramp 2 1/2 x 22 x 30'

Halfway across the empty gallery room, the floor ramps up to the far wall; viewers walk across the floor and up the ramp...

Under the ramp, I'm lying down, I'm crawling under the floor over which viewers are walking, I hear their footsteps on top of me...

I'm building up sexual fantasies on their footsteps, I'm masturbating from morning to night...

My voice comes up from under the floor: "you're pushing your cunt down on my mouth... you're pressing your tits down on my cock... you're ramming your cock down into my ass..."

(Now and then, you can hear me come: I've done this for you, I've done this with you, I've done this to you...)



## TRANSFERENCE ZONE

January 1972

Performance

Sonnabend Gallery, New York

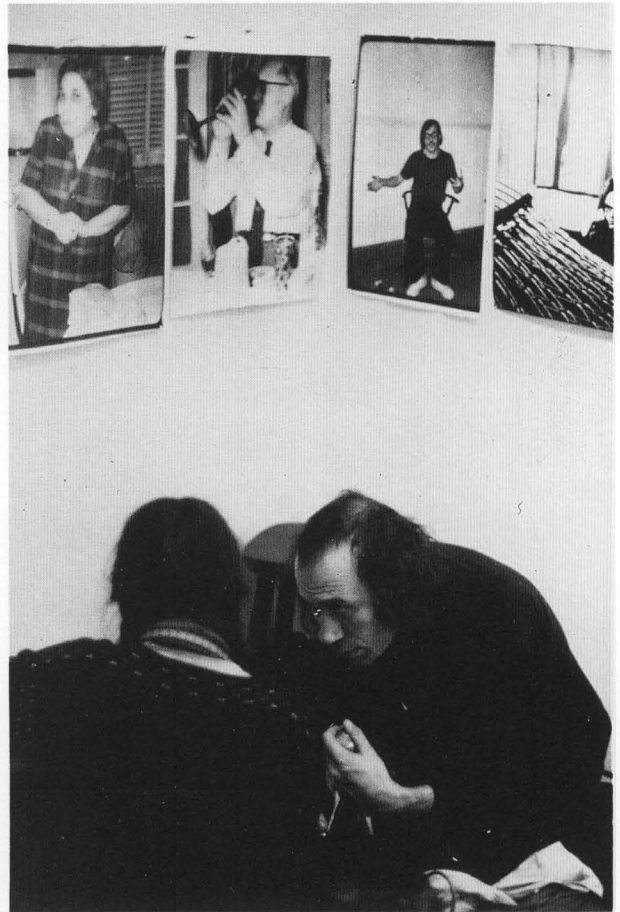
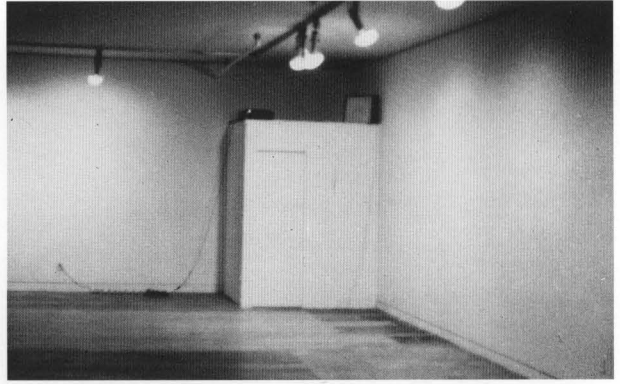
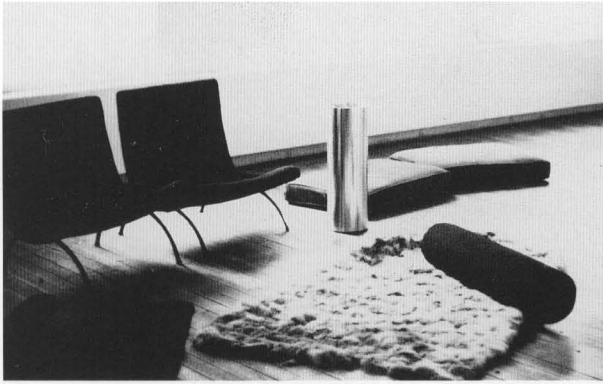
Three weeks, twice a week, eight hours a day

A large gallery room. In the far corner, there's a smaller room, a kind of isolation chamber. Opposite, next to the entrance, there's a kind of waiting room — chairs, rugs, pillows — where the viewer can take time out, keep away from the tension in the chamber, consider whether he/she wants to go inside the chamber.

Inside the chamber. The space is set as a kind of history room for me: on the wall are photographs of seven "prime people" in my life, from childhood to the present, people I've been close to and who have had a lasting effect on my life; on the floor are whatever possessions of these people that I still happen to have.

The piece occupies an entire gallery day; my presence is part of the space as experienced by the viewer. I'm inside the chamber, the door is locked from inside: my attempt is to absorb myself in the objects and images — get the feel of a "prime person", sense that person in the room with me.

A viewer can knock at the door. If I'm alone, I let the viewer in: I react to the viewer as if he/she were one of those "prime people" (my hope is that, if I've convinced myself thoroughly enough, the viewer might start to respond the way the "prime person" would have responded — the viewer might fall into my history, "become" the prime person.)





## RECEPTION ROOM

March 1973

Modern Art Agency, Naples

Three weeks, live performance for three days, three hours each day

An entrance corridor leading to a main room

In the corridor, next to the wall, a narrow rug is placed on the floor, a cushion at each end of the rug, an audio speaker behind each cushion. My voice, on a tape loop, addresses viewers as they enter the gallery: I should have greeted you in person, but there are reasons why I've withdrawn into the other room.

In the middle of the main room, a spotlight shines down from an overhanging wall onto a table, which has the feel of an examination table, an operating table: on top of the table is a mattress, and a white sheet — around the table are seven high stools, places for viewing, places for viewers. I lie on the mattress, I'm covered by the sheet, the sheet is pulled up over my head: I'm turning over, at a regular and monotonous pace, exposing one leg when I turn over on my front. My voice, on audiotape, comes up from the bed; my voice functions as a scenario that keeps me confined to the bed: once I've exposed my fears and shames publicly, then I might be able to face them in private.

My voice, in English, is translated by a male Italian voice. The Italian speaks first, referring to me in the third person: the Italian voice acts as an authoritarian voice, the voice of a doctor.





## BALLROOM

November 1973

Galeria Schema, Florence

Two performances, 90 minutes each

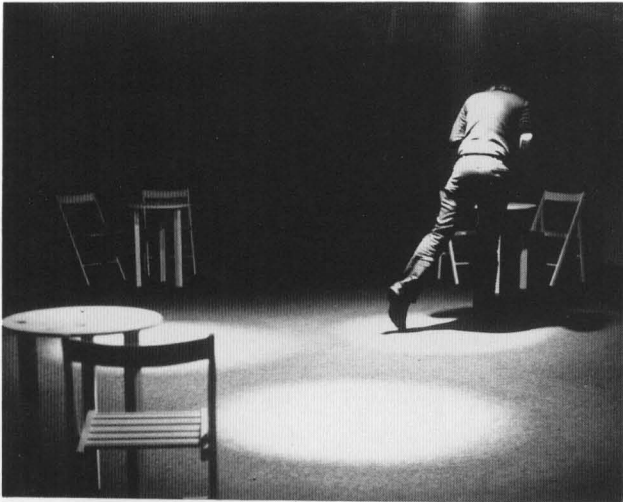
The situation is that of a dance hall: five sets of white tables and chairs are arranged in a circle around the "dance floor" — three spotlights shine down from the ceiling onto the floor.

In the background, a loop tape: my voice humming A Jolson's "Anniversary Song" — the way you would hum something absentmindedly, while going about your business.

I'm walking, shuffling, slowly, around the dance floor, from spot to spot. I'm turned inward — that is, it's more that I'm reflecting on something rather than putting on a show.

There's another tape loop, in my voice: it's as if I'm dancing with "you, Nancy" — but I'm thinking about going back to Kathy, so I'm dancing with "you, Kathy" — but I'm only trying to make up problems, see, I'm really still dancing with "you, Nancy" — but I'm just dreaming, I'm only talking to myself, it's as if I'm waiting to see who'll ask me first — so I might as well be dancing with "you, Kathy"...

Every now and then, I try to break out of my closed circle: I leave the spotlit area and go over to one of the tables: a flashlight shines in my face: I address myself to someone sitting there, anyone will do — I offer myself sexually, I'll prove that I don't want either of them, I don't want Kathy or Nancy — I've been too passive with them, they've emasculated me, I'll take out my frustrations on the viewer, I can circle around a table, do a war dance, I'll be threatening — I'm helpless, I need support, I'm throwing myself at someone's feet, I'm begging someone to get me out of my closed circle...



## AIR TIME

1973

Audio installation with performance on closed-circuit video

Three 90-minute performances each day

Variable dimensions, approximately 8 x 27 x 52'

Scattered through the exhibition-space are seven "stations": each consists of a white box with a white stool beside it — inside each box is an audiotape loop, the box is a radio station — the sound skips from box to box, winding through the space.

Each "radio program" is in my voice, addressed to viewers: I'm telling them stories — it's snowing, you're in the mountains, you're on a deserted pier, the waves are beating against the shore, I'm transporting you out of here so I can be alone with her...

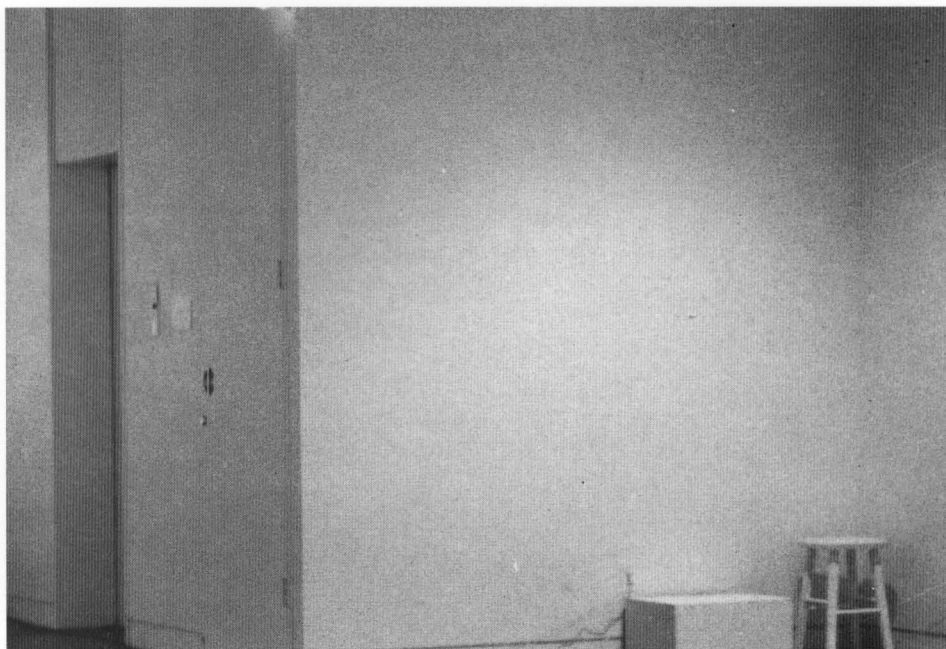
Off to the side of the exhibition-space, there's a blinking red light over the door to a small closet. In the middle of the exhibition-space, there's a TV monitor placed overhead on the edge of a free-standing wall. Three times a day, I'm inside the closet for a "recording session"; viewers can see me and hear me outside, on the TV monitor.

I'm facing a mirror: not to see myself, exactly, but to see myself the way "you" have seen me — you, who I lived with for four years, until recently — I'm recreating incidents in our life together — I want to see how ugly I am with you...

I need viewers to be there; I need viewers to see how I've been with you; once they see it, then I can't deny it: I have to come to terms with it, I have to realize that that's the way I am with you, and there's nothing I can do about it — the only way to change it is to leave you for good.







VOICES I  
FICTION

## ANCHORS

November, 1972

Installation (wood, steel, stones, fabric, audio)

Sonnabend Gallery, Paris

Variable dimensions, approximately 2 x 30 x 43'

Between two rooms of the gallery, there's a blanket in the doorway — it's folded and crumpled, as if someone's been lying in it — it's a kind of pivot point: if I were here, I could direct myself to each of three "shelters", spread throughout the two rooms.

There's a U-shape of stones: a pair of stockings — a tape loop with my voice making high-pitched "oooh" sounds.

There's a low wooden box, one end open: a nightgown — a tape loop with my voice making low-pitched "uunhh" sounds.

There's a canvas lean-to tent: a slip — a tape loop with my voice making middle-range "ehhrrr" sounds.

Each article of clothing is beige, it blends with the color of the shelter, which in turn blends with the color of the floor. The sounds come out of each shelter in a regular breathing rhythm — one minute of sound followed by two minutes of silence — the tapes are timed so that, each minute, there's a different set of sounds, from a different shelter.

In the far room, far corner, there's a yellow foam mattress and a pillow: a place to fall back into. My voice on the tape loop (a woman translates into French, changing my statement into question form): I've never had a sister — she could be my shelter — I'd be as close to her as the clothes she wears — she'd be my pet — I'm shaking, I'm losing my voice, I'm forced to talk in metaphor.

In the near room, at the entrance, there's a yellow foam seat under a platform: a place where a viewer can be headed off. A tape loop with another man's voice, in French: he tells the viewer to pass right over me — don't be tricked into wanting to help me — I don't want anyone real, I only want a sister I can't have.





MEMORY BOX III (VANISHING POINT)

Summer 1974

Installation (wood foam bed, curtain, slides, audio)

Projekt 74, Cologne

7 x 7 x 25'

A wedge-shaped wooden structure, 25 feet long, 7 feet by 7 feet at the front and tapering off to 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  feet at the back, on the floor. The structure is light gray, the color of the floor — it's grown out the floor, popped up, set itself in the way.

The entrance is at the front, covered by a curtain the same color as the structure itself: it's as if a show is about to go on, entrance is easy, a gentle push, step into the show.

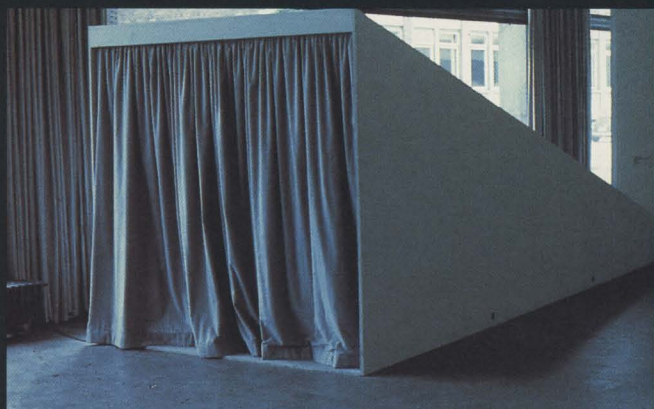
Inside there's a funnelling toward the other end: a foam mattress lies at the back — almost an abstraction of a mattress, a slab — squeezed in between the converging sides; the structure is shaped to lead down to this. There's an audiotape, my voice at the head of the mattress, speaking in the first person; this is a place meant for me — a place where I could drive myself under, make myself passive, receptive.

The walls lose their solidity: a slide projector, at the head of the mattress, projects slides up across the ceiling, changing quickly, stretching from back to front, washing over the sides; another slide projector, at the entrance, shoots slides down over the floor, toward the back, onto the mattress. On the ceiling, the projections are stills from movies, black and white — images springing out of my head. On the floor, the images appear in shifting colors: bodies, hands, clothes, coverings — a ground for me, a base for the fantasy-life on the ceiling above — the shapes come at me, make for my head, slide beneath me.

On tape, I'm speaking the text almost in syllables — as if I'm giving a dictation, as if I'm groping at a memory, pulling it together. The next places me in "genre scenes", settings that might have come out of prototype movies: war, revolution, western, gangster, romantic love, sex, religion, science-fiction. Each scene gives me, the principal actor, a motive for action, a reason to exist.

The genre scenes are interrupted by two passages that bring me back here, drop me here, on the mattress: I've lost commitment, I can't feel involved in art anymore, I have nothing to cling to, it's as if I'm dead, I really am dead, this is my last piece — I'd want the viewer to think that I was on the right track, that my work would have improved, if only I hadn't died.

The text is translated; the German translation, read in a normal speaking voice, comes out of a speaker at the side, at the foot of the mattress: it refers to me as "he" — the translator takes the viewer's position, an observer, a commentator. It's as if the viewer has come into my grave — more than remembering my life, I've been trying to give him a life to remember, something to remember me by.



## OTHER VOICES FOR A SECOND SIGHT

October 1974

Installation (wood, plastic, acoustical board, swivel chair, colored light, audio equipment and audio, video and slide projections)

Museum of Modern Art, New York

Variable dimensions, approximately 8 x 8 x 27'

A room like a recording studio: the ceiling is low, the walls are brown acoustical board — a swivel chair faces an audiotape deck and speakers on a table attached to the back wall — a red light blinks on the wall.

Each side-wall is cut by a long, narrow, horizontal window: a view into a "sound room", on either side of the recording studio. These sound rooms are silent, and dark; now and then, they 're "turned on".

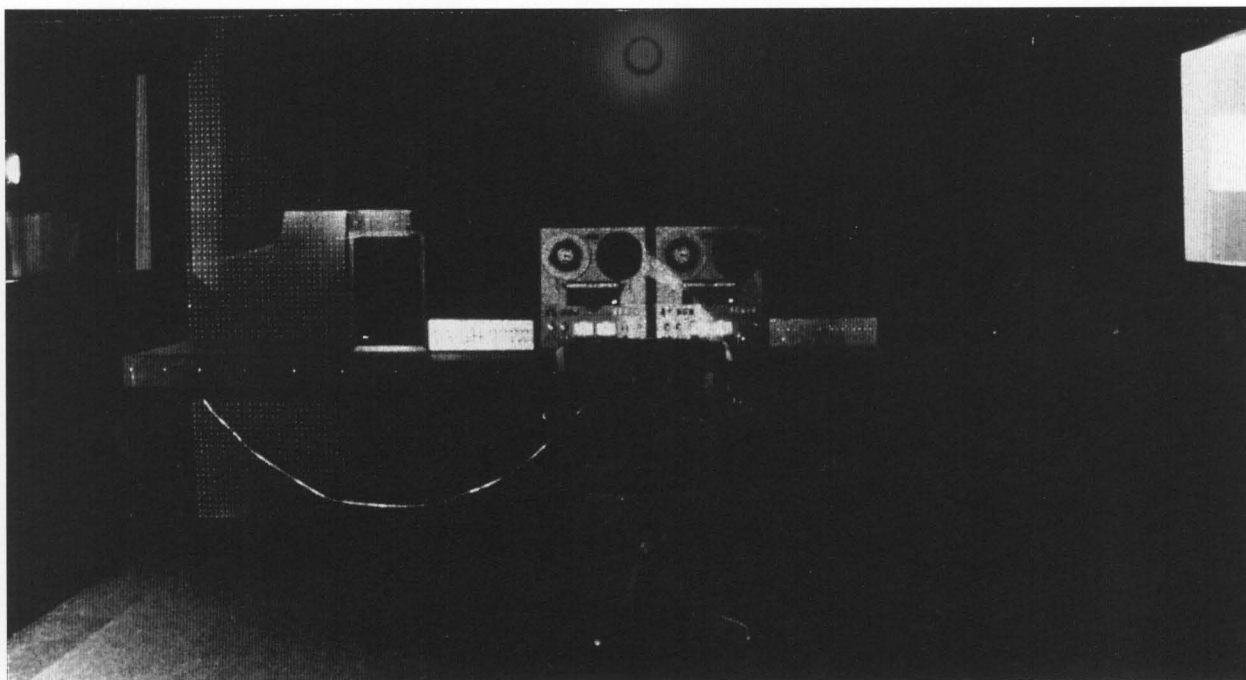
All the while, in the recording studio, the tape-recorder plays back an all-night radio talk show, the voice of an all night disc-jockey: "A quiet night, a taste of bitters, a look of blue...Come into the dark, that's the way I dream you hear me..." I come back each night with a different name: "This is your host, Victor Ackon"... "I remain: Veda Conti"... Each program fades off into wistful music, a quiet introspective jazz

While the soft music drifts, there's interference from one of the sound rooms. The sound room to the left is dark, crowded, vertical and fast. From opposite corners, slides are projected — the images are multiplied — through vertical rows of clear plastic sheets: shots of my body in negative, my body bending and stretching and exercising — shots of my face and body in color, pasted over with political posters. Sound escapes from the dark room, the sound of radio signals and teletype machines: I'm practising accents, I'm talking in the voice of revolutionaries, guerilla fighters.

The sound room to the right is light, sparse, horizontal and slow. From above and below, slides and video are projected — the images are multiplied — through horizontal rows of clear plastic sheets: circling sequences of sky and water — shots of my body from above, naked, stretched out as if swimming, bathed in colored filters. Sound escapes from the light room, the sound of wind, birds, ocean: I'm throwing my voice, on different levels, I'm narrating love and mysticism.

In the recording studio, my voice comes back under the music; my voice is changed, machine-like or dead; it resists invitations from either side: "The-se-duc-tion...The-re-buff...The withdrawal..."









## PLOT

December 1974–January 1975

Galeria A. Castelli, Milan

Installation (wood, steel, colored light, sawdust, fabric, slides, audio)

Variable dimensions, approximately 14 x 35 x 46'

The given space is intricate, church-like, one alcove winding and leading to another.

The space is plotted out: the space is divided into chapters, made readable. The plot thickens — the space is used as the ground for a conspiracy.

In the middle of the gallery is a wooden steel-lined box, audio-speaker inside: this is the ORCHESTRA PIT (HOW TO DIG THE HARMONY OF THE SPHERES): my voice, humming, changing my tune, this is like movie music, background music for the plot.

The space, then, is treated like a novel to walk into. The chapters are curtained off: this is theater, there's a suggestion of trickery, decoy. The objects behind the curtains look like art: specifically, recent American art — the plot is directed toward Italian artists, Italian critics, Italian collectors.

Each chapter has a title, written on a blackboard in front of the curtain: the title sounds like science fiction: there's a will toward metaphor, a desire to impose meaning — before my plot can convince others, I have to convince myself.

CHAPTER 1: SECRETS OF THE SKIN TRADE: a free-standing wall, knives cutting through the wood — there's the feeling of danger lurking behind the curtain.

CHAPTER 2: THE ACCELERATED MOUNTAIN: a ladder-like structure, closed outside, rungs on the inside: colored lights to mark the ascent, like vigil-lights on a journey.

CHAPTER 3: SEARCH FOR TOMORROW: Slides projected over a narrow ceiling, along the edge of the gallery: flashing colors, hands reaching for the sky: slides like search-lights.

CHAPTER 4: THE EXPLODING LETTER: A slab of wood covered with sawdust, a message carved into the wood: "It was as if he were writing on sand"

CHAPTER 5: THE AMERICAN CAGE: Intersecting wooden frames, like the scheme of an optical illusion put into three-dimensional space.

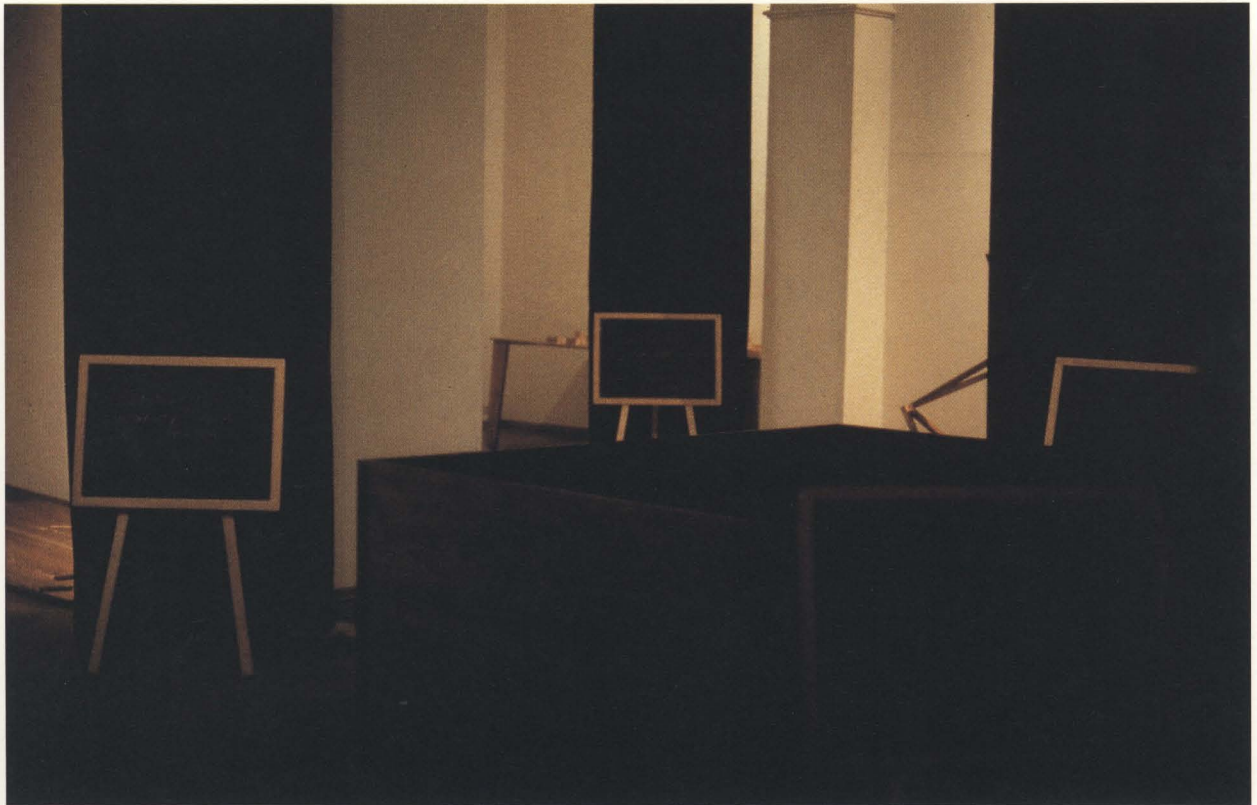
CHAPTER 6: SOFT ROADS: Slides stretched across the floor, across the middle of the gallery: flashing colors, my feet on various surfaces: slides like searchlights again.

CHAPTER 7: SLIDING CONTINENTS: two slabs of wood, one on top of the other: the top slab is chopped through, the broken pieces have slipped out of place.

CHAPTER 8: WHEN TIME STOPPED IN MID-AIR: a square of unpainted wood suspended by chains just below the ceiling: a blue light on top of the wood, blue glow cast on to the ceiling.

CHAPTER 9: THE SHRUNKEN CITY: a table-top town: small blocks of wood arranged like the model of a city.





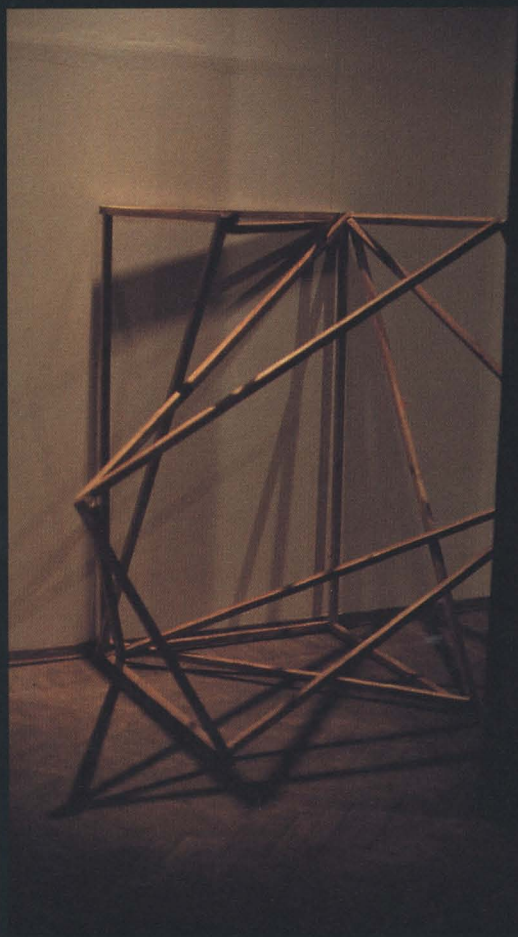
CHAPTER 10: THE HOMELESS BODY: Two boards tied together into a X-shape, like a scarecrow, a white shirt stretched over the framework: like a cross.

At the end of the journey through the novel, at the far end of the gallery, there are two audio speakers, second thoughts, my voice on one, an Italian translation on the other, louder: *ADDENDA (OUT OF THIS WORLD)*: one hundred nine additional chapters, spoken chapters: now the real plot comes to light — but you can't hold me to it, it's only a voice, there's nothing down in black and white.









VOICES II  
NEWS

## UNDER-HISTORY LESSONS

June 1976

Installation (painted wood planks and stools, light-bulbs, 2-channel audiotape)

"Rooms", P.S.1, Long Island City, New York

16 x 10 x 18'

The boiler-room of an old schoolhouse, converted into an alternative art-space. You go down a stairway into the boiler-room. In front of the boiler, and separating the boiler from the viewer's entry, is a pit about two feet deep, like an empty swimming pool.

Four wood planks, painted black, are laid down over the length of the pit. Six wood stools, very low and painted black, are placed in front of each plank. The existent electric cords, from the ceiling, are lowered so that two bare bulbs fit in-between the planks, in-between the stools, on either side, nearly touching the ground. These are the tables and stools of a schoolroom, at the base of the school. This is a schoolroom at your feet; you can step down into it, you can fall down into it.

From under the tables comes an audio sound-track, like the traces of a learning exercise. From one corner, in the front, my voice announces a subject: "Lesson Number 1: Let's be suckers..." From the opposite corner, at the back, my voice re-iterates: "Ready: Let's be suckers..." From both corners, my voice talks with itself and becomes the multiple voices of students: "All right: We-are-suck-ers...Repeat: We-are-suck-ers...Again: Mm-mm-mm-mm..." "





THE AMERICAN GIFT

1976

Installation (wood, blue light, 2-channel audio)

Original installation: CAPC, Bordeaux; permanently installed, Centre Pompidou, Paris

10 x 12 x 12'

A cubicle, white on the outside, with entrances at the four corners.

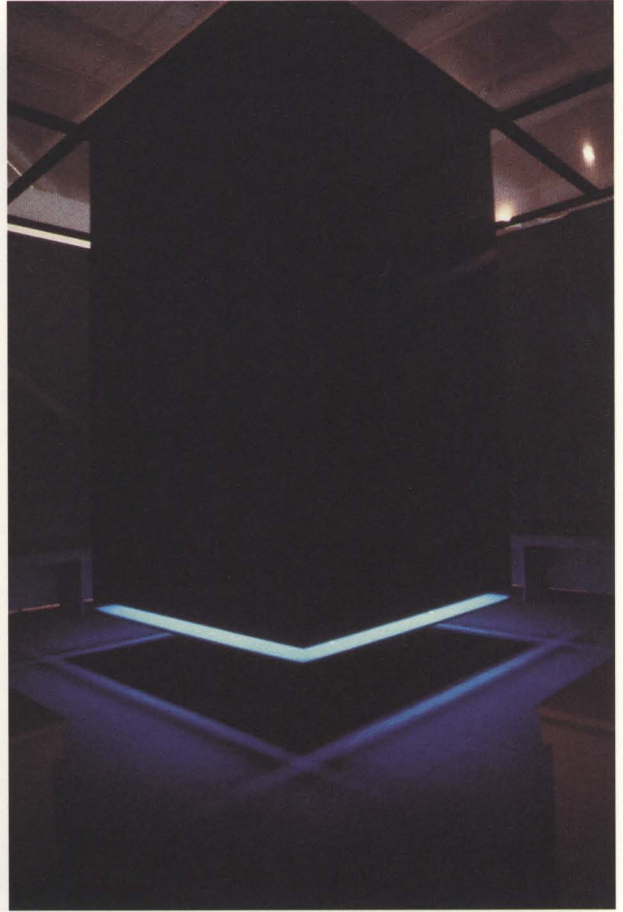
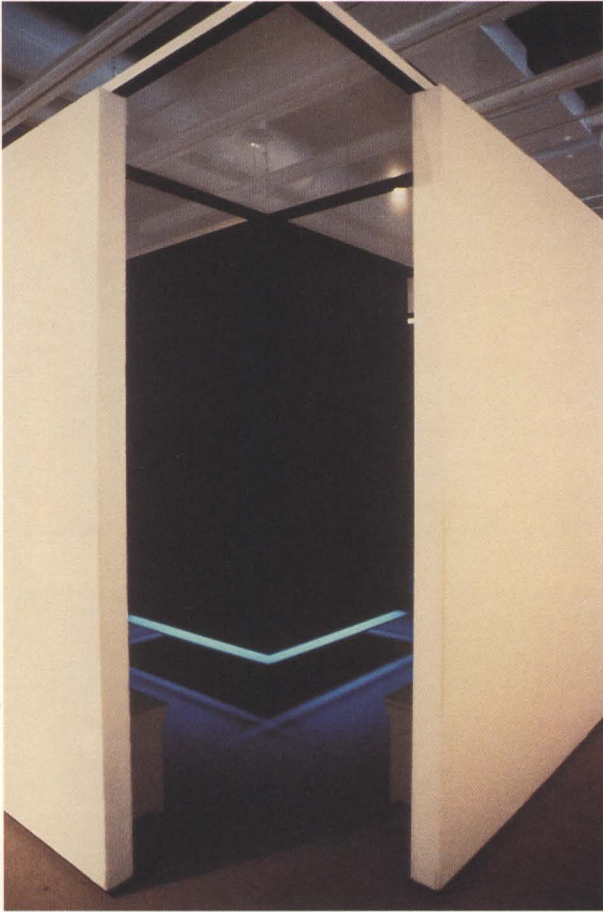
The inside is gray. Each wall ends, at the bottom, in a continuous bench. Behind the bench, a speaker is embedded inside the wall.

In the middle of the cubicle, a black box — 8 feet high, 4 feet square — hangs down from the ceiling, one foot off the floor. A blue glow slips through a slit around the bottom. A speaker is installed inside the box.

The audiotape takes off from the fact of translation. At the walls, behind the benches, my voice whispers in English; a French man and a woman — speaking sing-song, in the tone of a recitation — translate what I'm saying but shift the person: when I say "I", the French voices say we. The American voice "teaches" the Europeans; the Europeans "learn" the American message.

Now and then, from inside the black box, my voice shouts French, an American's awkward French: this is the voice of America, presenting America — American music, American sounds.





WHERE WE ARE NOW (WHO ARE WE ANYWAY?)

November 1976

Installation (wooden table and stools, painted wall, 4-channel audio)

Sonnabend Gallery, New York

Variable dimensions, approximately 10x54x32'

The circumstances are: a show at 420 West Broadway, "center" of the New York art world — at least that part of the art world that's in the news, as we know it. This is Soho at the end of the 70's: now the galleries have been there since the beginning of the decade (now they need — to keep themselves going — not attention but establishment, not headlines but sales...

The given space is: an L-shaped corridor that makes, frames, an enclosed room, the main room of the gallery — the corridor is almost a non-room, a fluid space starting at the entrance elevator and including windows that look out onto the street, onto West Broadway.

My method of construction is: close, further, the enclosed room — open, further, the already "open" corridor.

The entrance to the enclosed room is walled off, and the outside of the room is painted black: the room becomes an object within the overall space — an object loaded with the memory that there's a room inside. Alongside the room, running through the corridor, is a wooden plank forty feet long and two feet wide, a plank that changes function: it starts by settling into the room as a table, eight stools on either side — but it doesn't stop there, it continues toward the window, extends out the window and becomes a diving board.

The gallery, then, is used as a meeting place. Hanging down above the plank — at the point where table turns into diving board — is a set of speakers: a clock ticks, my voice calls the meeting to order: one sentence keeps coming back, "Now that we know we failed...": this is a meeting at the edge: this is like a game of musical chairs, not everybody has a place here. There's something off to the side, there are "skeletons" in the closet: from inside the black room come muffled voices, the sounds of a crowd — this is something we can fall back on, this is something that keeps nagging at us. When the crowd dies out, one voice stands alone, at the table: each of us has a different answer. By this time the clock is ticking again: the meeting begins one more time: "Now that we're back where we started..."











VD LIVES/TV MUST DIE

1978

Installation (rubber, cable, bowling balls, video with sound)

The Kitchen, New York

Variable dimensions, approximately 10 x 30 x 70'

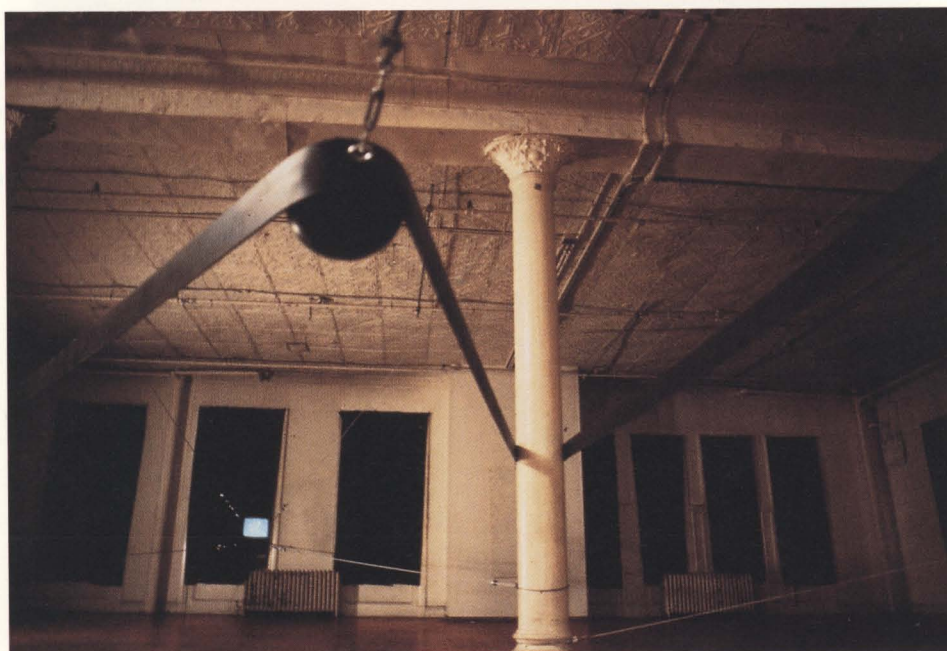
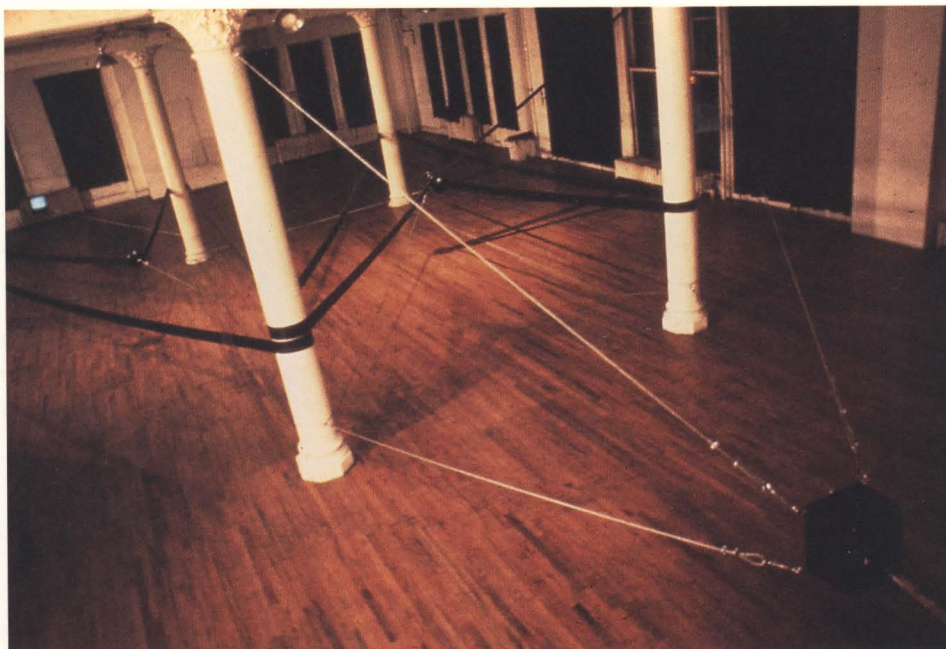
A space with five columns in the middle.

Each set of three columns is made to function as the support for giant slingshot: a band of rubber wrapped around the columns and holding in place a bowling ball. The ball is hooked through the rubber to a cable in tension; the ball is directed toward a television monitor, held by cable to the columns. Potentially a person can unhook the ball: the ball would be shot to the television set. One of the slingshots has its plot complicated: a second rubber band envelops the ball, in an opposite orientation — the ball can be released not toward the TV monitor but toward a window, and out into the street.

Monitor 1: gray screen — the sound of gunshots — staccato voice: "You don't want a prick that looks like that/She don't want a cunt that looks like that... I don't want my body!" — quick flashes of sex, fade-in to vagina or penis.

Monitor 2: a field of penises and vaginas, grouped together, joined together in various combinations — the scene shifts, the bodies are moved out of place and into place, my voice acts as a guide: "...over, move over...there, right there...no, no, you missed it...there, that's better, that's good o that's so good o that's so good...now, aim in...now you're almost like him..." Now and then the image blurs: "...But nothing lasts forever; and meanwhile, back in the jungle". (Sound of birds)... Now and then, another voice cuts in: "Wait-warn them-Haven't they heard?-New York's been invaded-Look out-Look outside..."







## MONUMENT TO THE DEAD CHILDREN

November 1978

Wood plank, cable, lead weight, audio

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Variable dimensions, approximately 22 x 2 x 24'

The piece is designed for the central stairway, facing the main entrance. The viewer enters the museum, walks through the entrance-hall and under an arch, and faces the stairway.

The stairway rises to a landing, from where it continues up to the second floor. On the landing a black plank, like a diving-board, extends out over the lower stairs: tied to the end of the plank, a line of cable goes up to the ceiling, around a pulley, and down the floor — a lead weight hangs at the end of the cable, balancing the diving-board, keeping it in place.

Under the plank is a speaker. One voice announces: "Warning: Not one person more". Then two voices, together, speak the announcement, then three, then four, then five, then six... At the end, no voice is distinguishable, the plank is overcrowded with voices, the plank is filled up with a mass of sound.

A viewer, then, coming down the stairs, has a choice: instead of continuing down the stairs, the viewer might go out on to the plank, go down the easy way. One viewer on the plank isn't enough to change the balance, the weight holds the diving-board in place. But then another viewer might follow the example of the first: another person on the plank, and then another, and another. By this time, their collective weights have lowered the plank, raised the weight. By this time, then, still another viewer enters the museum: the viewer comes under the arch, under the diving-board, under the weight. Now the people on the plank heeding the warning, decide to go back on to the stairs: or the people on the plank, tempted by the warning and by the diving-board itself, decide to take a chance, jump off the edge: in either case, the weight shifts, the board springs back into place, the lead-weight falls to the ground...



## MOVABLE FLOOR

November 1979–February 1980

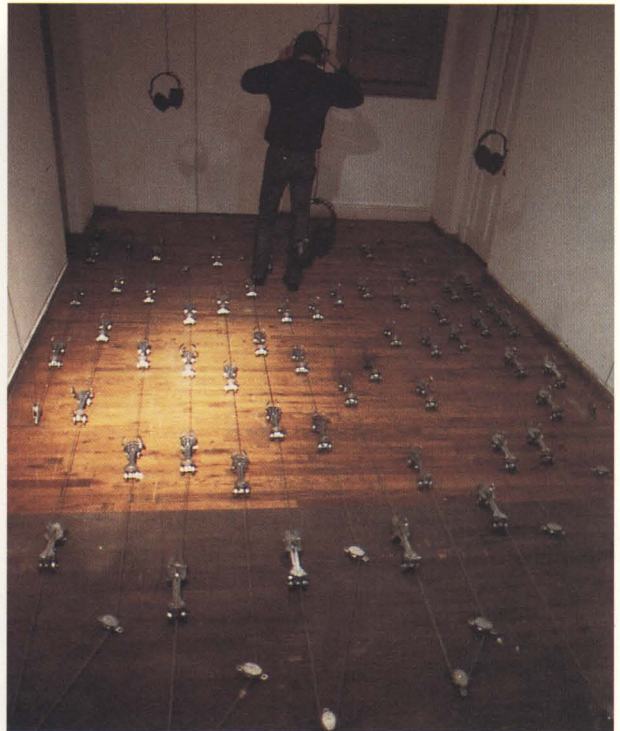
Installation (roller-skates, cable, headphones, audio)

Rhode Island University, November 1979; The Kitchen, New York, February 1980

Variable dimensions

A closed cable system that covers the available floor space and draws roller skates across the room: a person can step between and over the cable; or a person can, at least theoretically, step on the skates, use superhuman strength, and skate across the room, at least as much of the room as possible until a skate reaches the end of its line and stops the system. (In the first installation of the piece, each cable is approximately the same length, each cable holds one skate; in the second installation, the lines of the cable are different lengths according to the space available — a line, e. g., has to be shortened to allow a door to open — and there are four skates on each line, with different spaces between skates according to length of the line.)

Above the skates, four headphones hang from the ceiling: a person has to walk between the lines of cable and go up to each headphone in order to hear it. As the room is entered, the first headphones come upon each holds one phrase of disco music, repeated and overlapped, while the last headphone holds a Chilean Revolution song developed one phrase at a time. (In the first installation of the piece, all the headphones are visibly the same, all the headphones are black — only the sound within differentiates them; in the second installation, the headphone carrying the revolution song is visually pointed to, the headphone is red.)



## EXERCISE MACHINE FOR AN ETERNAL RETURN

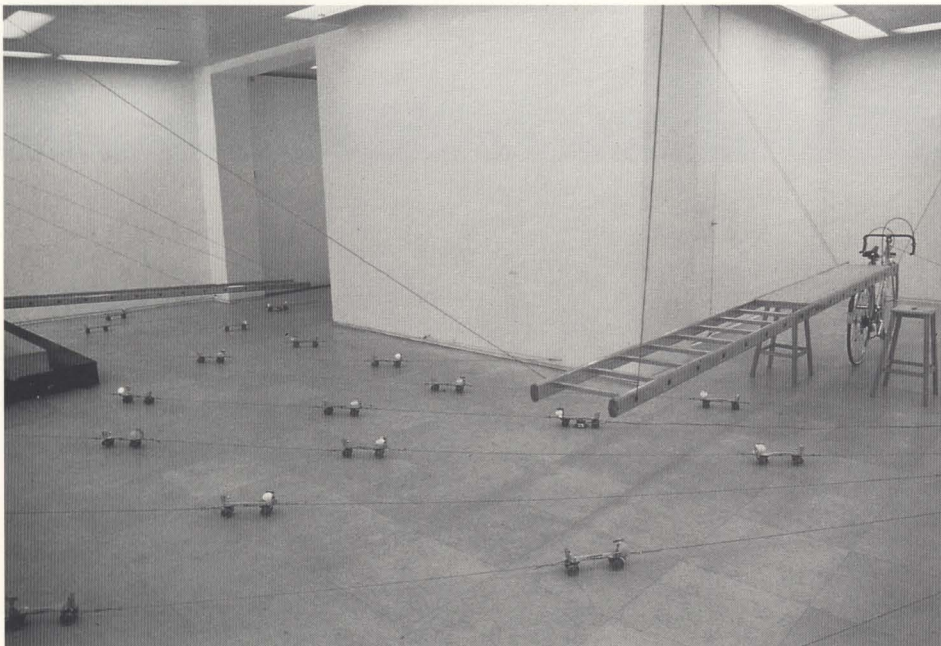
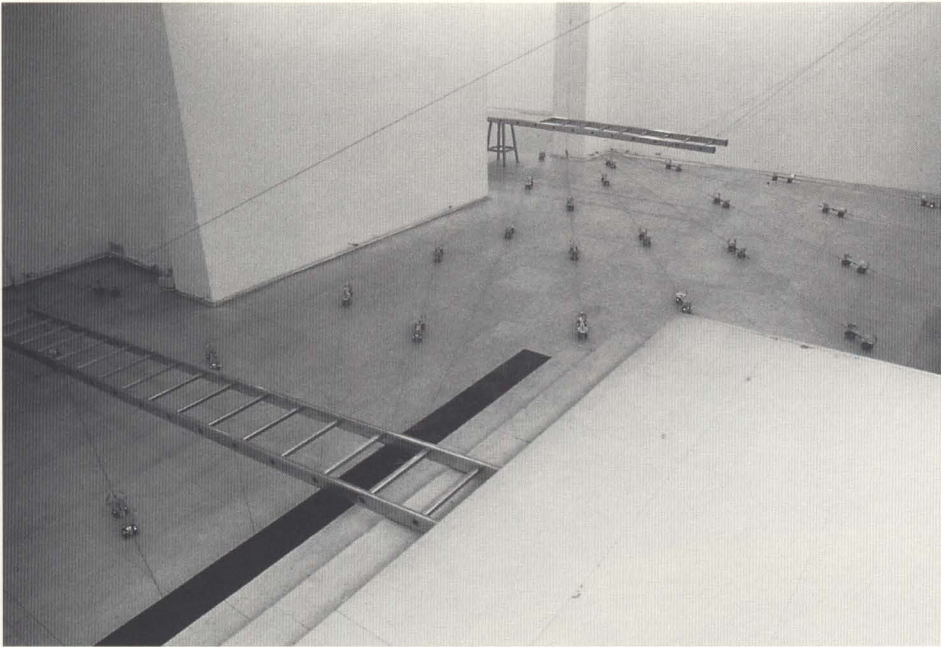
November 1979

Installation (roller-skates, aluminium ladders, bicycle, cable, wood plank and stools, audio)

Sonnabend Gallery, Paris

From the entrance platform, an aluminium ladder extends like a drawbridge into the gallery; supporting the ladder, two lines of cable go back to the top of the entrance-door; one line goes down to the floor where it draws a pulley-system of roller-skates across the two rooms of the gallery; in the second room, the cable connects with a bicycle, on the back of which is an aluminium ladder, half-covered by wood so that it turns into a table, with wooden stools on each side; the bicycle-with-ladder, then, continues the pulley system until it joins with the second line of cable at the entrance-door. Under four skates there are audio speakers: the skates function as props for slogans and rallying-cries, motivations, that provide at least the signs of an invitation to use (while, at the same time, taking back that invitation); "One step forward, two steps backward..."





DECOY FOR BIRDS & PEOPLE

1979

Aluminium ladders, bird-cages, cable, audio

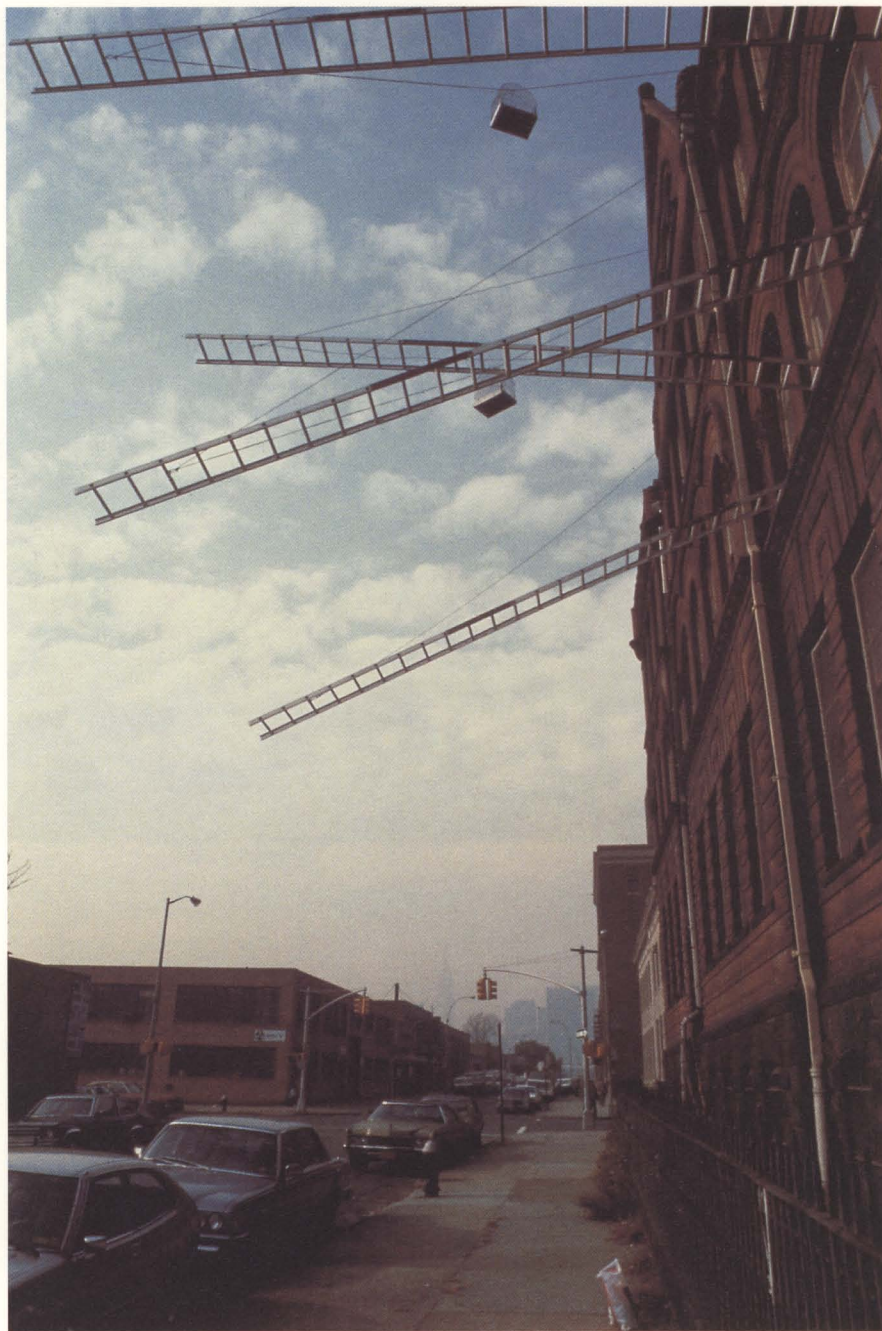
4 units, 50' x 1 1/2' x 4"

The windows are used as supports for see-saws, made up of aluminium ladders. Each see-saw is half inside the room and half outside. One see-saw is connected to the other by cable; when one see-saw is up, the next is down

Bird-cages hang from the cable and move as see-saws are moved. Audio-speakers, inside the cages, substitute for the birds: a mechanical bird song, the sound of the cuckoo clock, skips from cage to cage, inside and outside. Sometimes the cuckoo slows down, like a dying bird; sometimes it speeds up, like a bird that tries to fly free. A buzzer, as if in a laboratory experiment, cuts the cuckoo short; sometimes, the sped-up cuckoo culminates in the ringing of a bell — it's won the prize, it's escaped.







VOICES III

"KEEP TELLING YOURSELF. IT'S ONLY A MOVIE..."

## MY WORD

1973–1974

Super-8 film, 120 min

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

1. By the end of 1973, Super-8 film was a part of my past. The 1970 pieces had almost all been on film: still camera, one take, three-minute film; my image as a target in front of the camera. If, now, I was going to return to film, three or four years later, the method would have to be different: moving camera ("every trick in the book"), change of scene, feature-length film; my person as viewpoint rather than target.
2. *My Word* started from the assumption that, at this particular time (1973), Super-8 is — by convention — a silent medium: I would make a film, then, about being silent, about not talking.
3. Not talking would have its reasons, not talking could make a plot: I won't talk about it (whatever it is) because I don't want you (whoever you are) to know.
4. Super-8 film had "made my image": on the one hand, the 1970 pieces recorded my image as that image adapted to, or changed by, my activity; on the other hand, the 1970 pieces were the first pieces attended to by the media. If now, in 1973, I was going to use Super-8 again, I had to parody the image, the trademark, that I had let film form for myself.
5. In the back of my mind: first-person films like the Robert Montgomery version of Raymond Chandler's *The Lady in the Lake*, or Claude Chabrol's *The Third Lover*.
6. "I" blowing itself up, becoming bigger than it should be, becoming "too big for its britches" (just as Super-8 film is being blown up here, becoming a feature-length movie, becoming bigger than it should be, becoming too big for its medium).
7. Super-8 film as home movies: the film takes place in one space (my own home, my own mind) — the film starts with corner and wall (banging my head against the wall, driving myself into a corner), then goes to windows (but I can only walk past them, I can't look out), then the deep interior space (I can walk around in circles), then out the window (but I can only look), then outside (but it's only the roof of my own house), then back inside (I can only go home again).
8. If the film has no sound, if I can't talk about "it" aloud, then I can always write it down: words would be written on the screen, as if on a blackboard. Not speaking, "person" loses breath, loses the "spirit" of person: the person becomes de-personalized, becomes a schematic of person, as if a person were looking down at his/her self from out of the body (as if a person were looking at his/her self on screen).
9. The words are written at the bottom of the screen, as if they're subtitles to a scene that isn't here, subtitles to a conversation in another language that isn't there) (it's all in my mind anyway, it's only words).
10. In 1973, the last two years of work had been live: the making of a meeting-place between artist and viewer — the making of an intimate space. By 1973, this psychological space seemed to be an escapist space: pointing out the faults in "us" was an excuse to avoid seeing the flaws in an external system, a social/cultural/political system. (*My Word* turned out to be the last piece that "showed myself").
11. The film keeps ending, keeps being about to end (I can't end the film because then I would be ending the relationships — I can't end the relationships because then I would be ending myself). So the film is either a last gasp of "I", a desperate attempt to retain what's seen as "identity"; or it's a view, from a detached non-I position, of "me" as a dead end, of the absurdity of personalness.











## THE RED TAPES

1976-1977

Videotape, b/w, sound

140 minutes

Camera: Ed Bowes; Sound: Tom Bowes

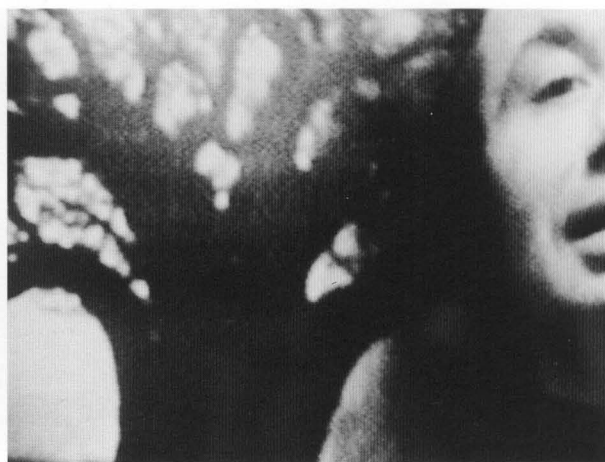
THE RED TAPES is a three-part videotape originally designed for video projection: the attempt is to mix video space (close-up) with movie space (landscape) — landscape is “brought home”, flattened out, pulled in close. I am the primary agent in the tapes (in the first two tapes, the only agent): the tapes deal with placement of person — installing person into geography, giving that geography a history. The base of the tapes is the use of voice: calling out as a way to place oneself — calling into existence an ancestry, a history — naming names, accusing that history — answering up for oneself as participant in that history — calling out of the ruins of a history. The method of the tapes is the alternation of blank screen and image; when the screen is blank (when the screen is gray, neutralized), there is an undercurrent of voice — voice breaks into language, language breaks into image, gray fades into picture.

Tape I: Common Knowledge. The space here is a picture-plane space: landscape appears only to reveal itself as a photograph of a landscape. When I appear, the focus is on my face (though often the face is hidden — wearing a blindfold, in front of a sun-drenched window). The emphasis of the “close look” pinpoints the method of Tape I: the scheme of a detective story.

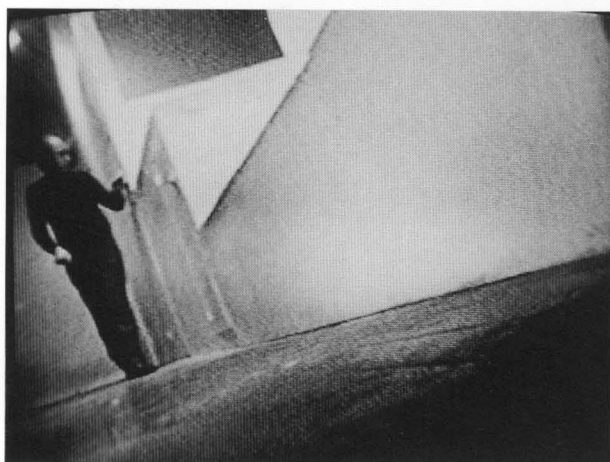
Tape II: Local Color. The space here is more sculptural: the video frame acts as container for “things”. So the field of action is enlarged, put into a deeper space: notions of America are seen in context, blended into overall notions of “culture”, “civilization”. If the focus in Tape I is on “picture” the focus in Tape II is on “shape” (“building”). When I appear, the focus is no longer on face but on hands, feet, finally on whole body: I am no longer the recipient of myth as in Tape I—now I am the instrument of a myth. Whereas the voice in Tape I was novelistic, the voice in Tape II is essayistic: the language attempts to formulate a grammar, establish rules, set itself up as an analyzer.

Tape III: Time Lag. Now the space becomes a theatrical space. There are fewer scenes here, the scenes are longer: the feeling is of a summing-up, a kind of meditation. Whereas Tape I presents photographs, pre-fixed views, Tape III shows the act of drawing the view, drawing out the view, bringing the view into existence. One scene brings in other actors: two women and a man — together with me, they carry on a rehearsal — they are acting out a kind of prototype American novel, they are rehearsing America. (The camera moves slowly, continuously, in medium close-up, over a large loft-space: the actors become part of the props in the space—actual space and people are in rehearsal, potential, about to be worked on, worked over.)









ARCHITECTURE I  
GAMES & PROTOTYPES



## INSTANT HOUSE

1980

Self-erecting architectural unit (flags, wood, cable and pulleys)

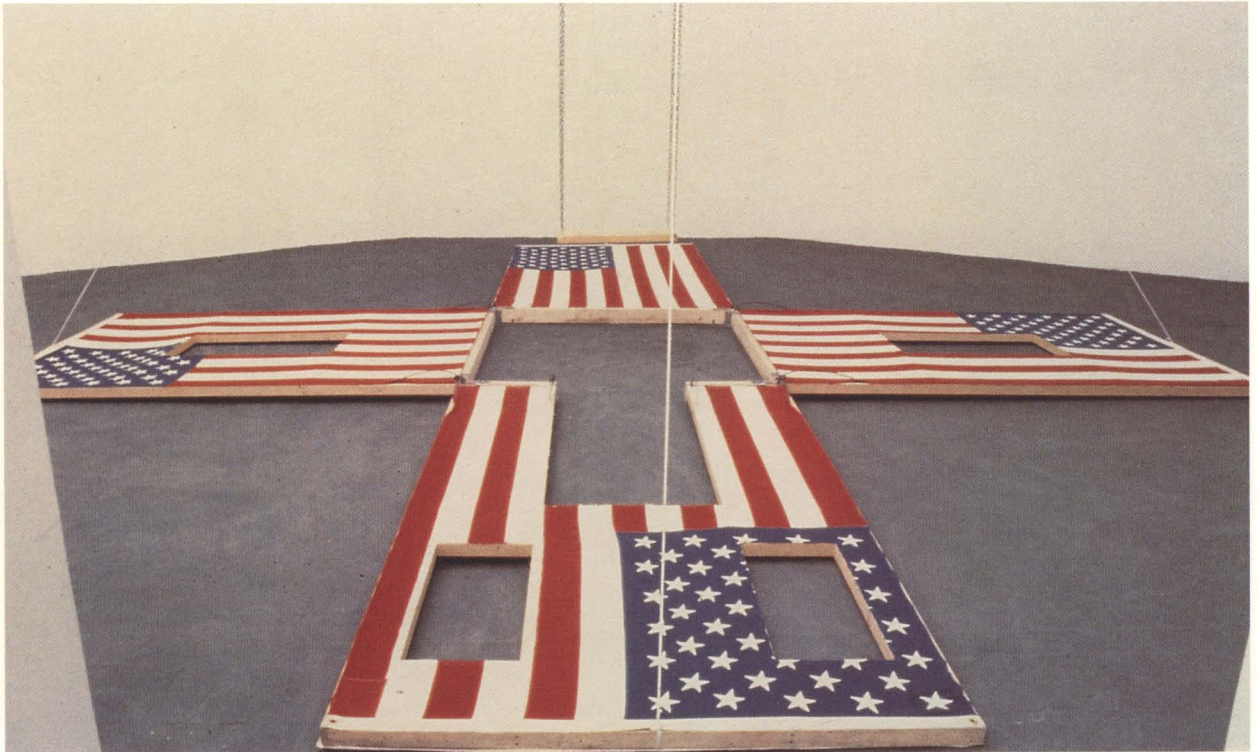
8 x 21 x 21'

Lying on the floor, four United States flags, framed in wood, are attached in the form of a cross to a central wood framework.

In the middle of the flags, a swing hangs down from the ceiling; the flags are attached by rope to the rope that holds the swing.

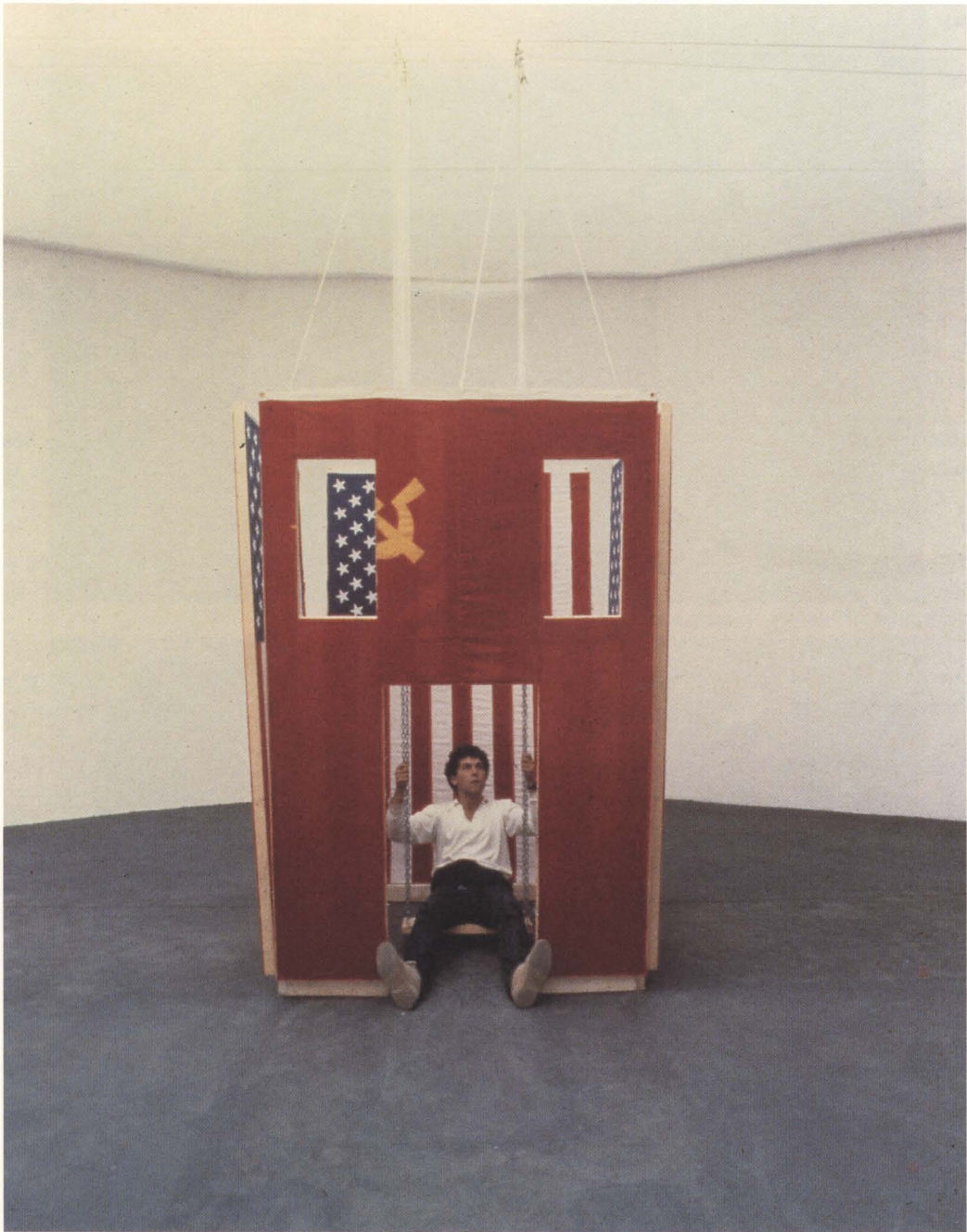
When a person sits on the swing, the swing goes down and the flags swing up, making the walls of a house around the person sitting; the flags are cut for windows and door. The undersides of the U.S. flags are Soviet flags, which are uncovered now to make the outside walls of the house. Inside the house, the person on the swing sits alone within U.S. walls, while raising the Soviet flag, outside, for others.

When the person gets up, the swing rises back to its original position, and the flags fall back down to the floor.









## MOBILE HOME

1980

Painted wood, tricycles, red shirts, cable and pulleys

10 x 48 x 8'

A self-erecting long house, activated by a bicycle.

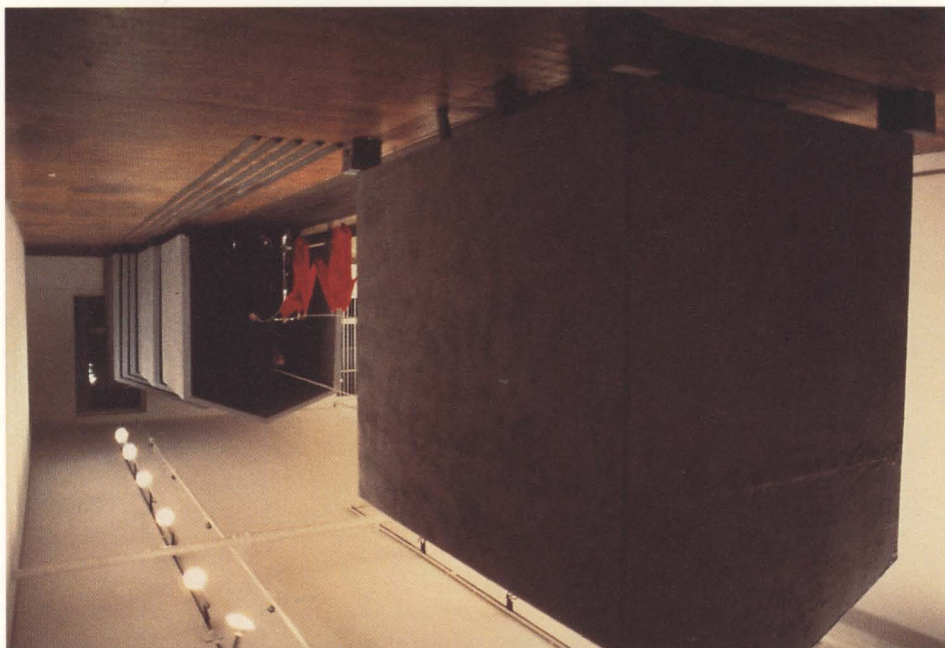
At one end of a space, a stack of five pitched-roof houses, with open fronts; each smaller house is stored inside a larger house. The houses are on wheels; the wheels sit on tracks that extend to the other end of the space. At this other end, a similar house, one size smaller, faces the stacked houses. All the houses are blue-gray, sand-textured; the stacked houses are filled with music (when the houses are stacked, the sound is jumbled — but there's something recognizable, there's a strain of a vaguely familiar song).

Inside the stack, a tricycle is fit inside the smallest house, and connected to it. The tricycle faces the house at the other end; the tricycle is joined to this house by a clothesline — a row of seven red shirts, clasped together cuff to cuff, hang on the clothesline.

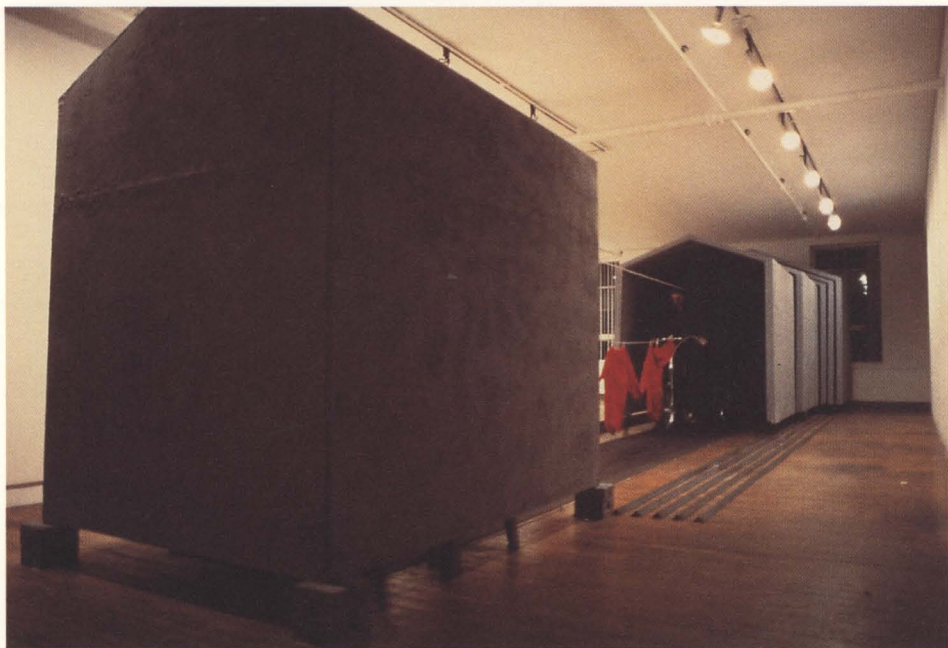
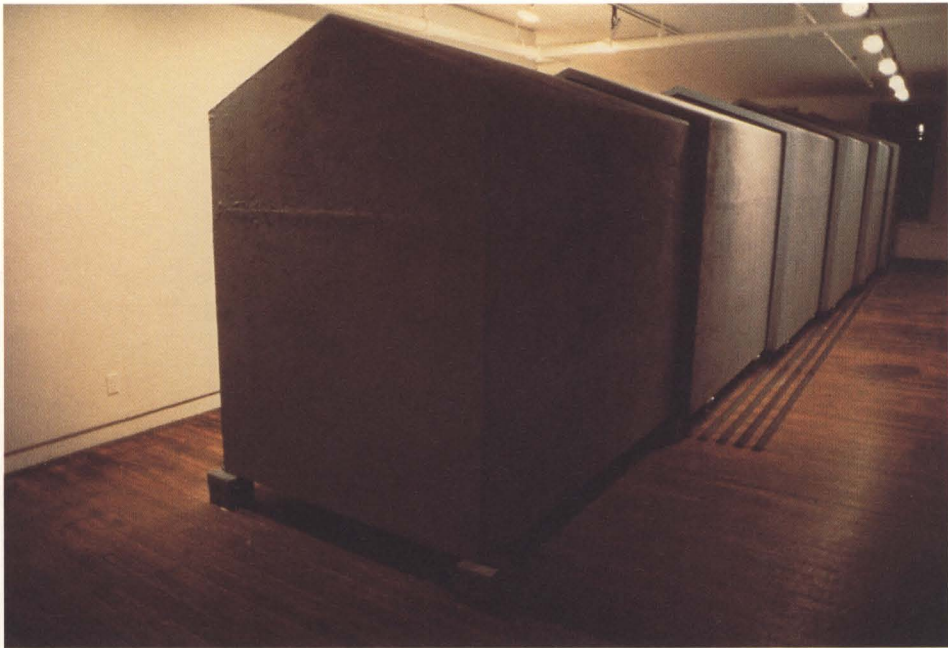
When a person rides the tricycle, each house pulls out of the next-larger house. The tricycle drags along a larger and larger string of houses. The tricycle-rider rides into the receiver-house, at the other end: the rider is enclosed in a tunnel of houses, a mausoleum of houses.

As each house pulls out of the stack, one phrase of the jumbled music becomes distinguishable from the next. Each house plays one phrase of The Star-Spangled Banner, a marching-band instrumental version.

When a person gets off the tricycle, the houses spring back into their original stack.









## FAN CITY

1981

Aluminum, fabric, cable and pulleys

12 x 25 x 25'

A cross-shape of wedges that fan out into a city of tents.

Four aluminum fins that extend, in a cross-shape, from a central mast. Around the mast, two cut-out aluminum figures — streamlined human shapes — bisect each other; the bottoms of the figures are enclosed in a black steel box which holds the mast — the fins are hinged onto the mast.

Each fin is a sandwich of two fins, inside of which a batch of vertical aluminum bars holds a roll of colored fabric. One fin is static, and one is movable; a viewer can grab the handle of the movable fin, and push or pull the fin so that it rotates clockwise; if the fin is pulled as far as it can go, up to the next static fin, it pulls out with it three tent-frames — the vertical bars inside the sandwich of fins have extended into tent-frames. As each fin rotates, half of one of the aluminum figures rises up the mast; each figure, at the bottom, is a fish or a bomb. If all four fins are rotated, a whole circle of fins is erected, and the aluminum figures are joined together again — full figure now — at the top of the mast.

While a viewer holds the handle, keeping the fin out, another viewer can pull on a ring at the front of a tent-frame: a swathe of fabric, in the shape of a college-football pennant, pulls out from an shade-roller at the vertical bar, making a side wall for the tent. The pennants have words, in American-Egyptian type-face, like college-football pennants.

When all the fins are rotated, and all the tent-frames are folded out, and all twelve rings are pulled on by viewers, all the tents have names; they label dwelling-places for the inhabitants of this city of tents. The blue quarter: "GAYS", "PUNKS", "NYMPHOS"; the green quarter: "BEGGARS", "CRIPPLES", "OLD FOLKS"; the brown quarter: "BLACKS", "ALIENS", "PINKOS"; the red quarter: "JUNKIES", "SCHIZOS", "FREAKS".

When viewers let go of the rings, the pennants retract; when viewers let go of the fin-handles, the tents fold up, and the fins return to their cross-shape.



## BAD DREAM HOUSE

1983

Wood, brick-face, shingles, plexiglass, screen

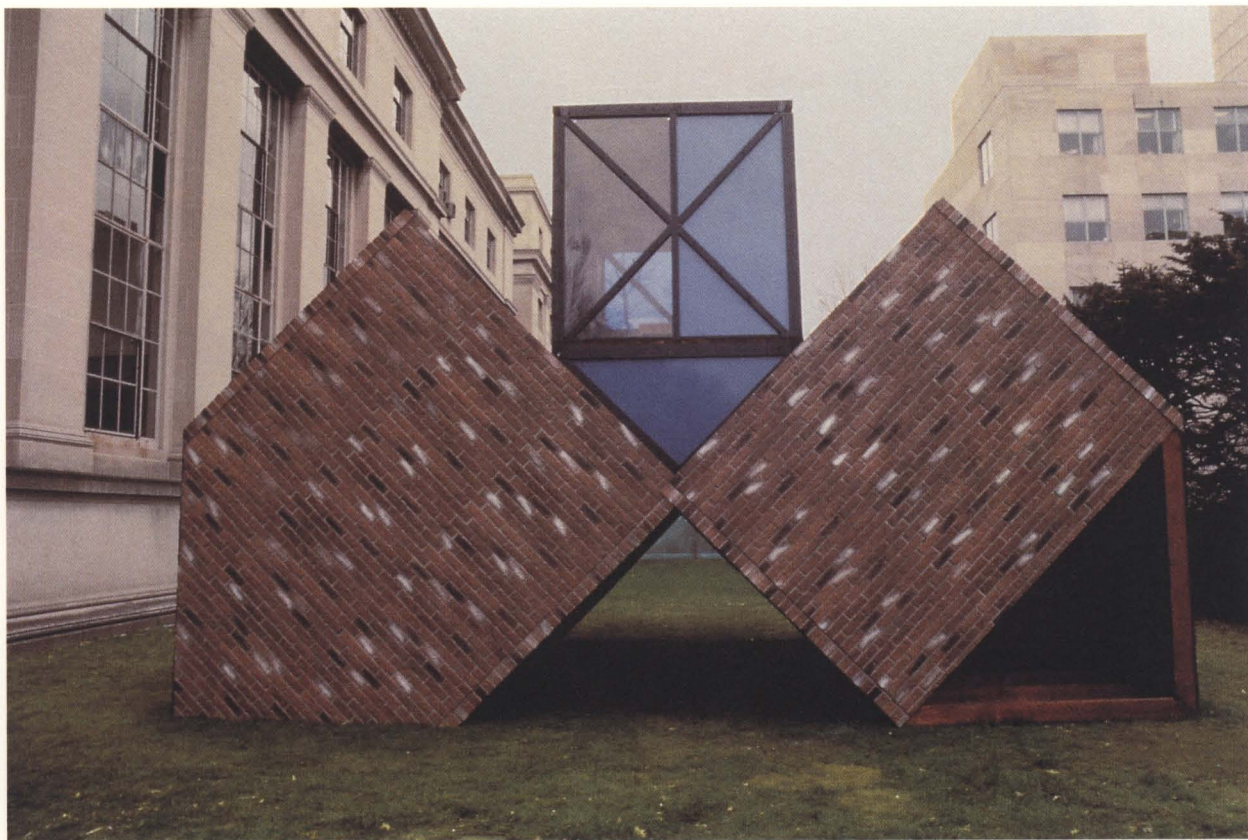
18 x 24 x 25'

Three upside-down houses, fit together to make a multi-part dwelling: two upside-down houses tilted over and propped up against each other, so that they cradle a third upside-down house above.

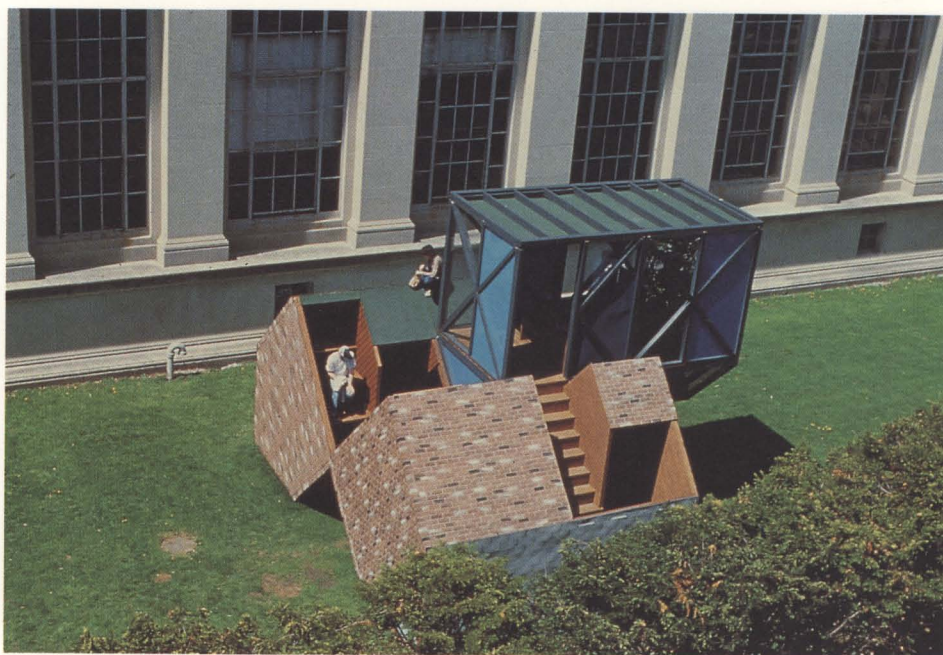
The two houses on the ground are houses conventionally found on the ground: the outside walls are brick-faced, the roofs are shingled. The third house, cantilevered on top, is a glass house, a garden house, a house in the air.

You enter at either end, through an open gable. The interior walls are wood-panelled, stained brown; the ceilings (which are now underfoot and to the side) are sky-blue; the floors (which are now overhead) are grass-green.

You walk past (or sit down at) an upside-down table, you walk up to the house's underside, facing the sky now and turned into bleachers. Or you walk further up to the glass house; the stairway leads onto a catwalk through open space, its railing doubling as the back of a continuous and winding seat. The walls of the glass house are multi-panelled: transparent or opaque, mirrored or see-through, clear or blue-tinted. You can sit next to another person, or opposite another person; you can sit facing yourself in a mirror; you can sit blocked off from the outside, or you can see through to the outside, either clear or tinted blue.











## SUB-URB

1983

Stained and painted wood, steel, astroturf

10 x 98 x 21'

An underground housing complex: this is, literally, a “sub-urb” — a city placed under, under the earth.

A long house, with a pitched roof; the house is inverted, and inserted into the ground. Now that the roof is at the bottom, it's stepped, so that it's usable as a floor. Now that the floor is at the top, at ground level, it's laid over with Astroturf-covered panels. Across the length of the top, half the panels are movable on track, over the width of the top. Across the width, there are two panels for three spaces, leaving one space uncovered.

Shaved into the Astroturf, like a mowed lawn, are alphabet letters, one per panel; different typographies separate one word from another. When all the panels are slid over, to each side, the words on one side read: S-L-U-T... B-U-M... B-O... R-E-B...; the words on the other side read: S-C-U-M... M-U-D... B-C... R-O-B... When the panels are all slid over, to either side, the housing complex is inaccessible; there's no way to get down into it. There's a gap down the middle; all you can do is look in: each side of the central corridor is stained wood — the boards make long American flags.

When the sliding panels are slid over to the middle, a new word forms out of the other words: S-U-B-U-R-B. Stairways are accessible now, down into the housing; the stairway and its alcove are stained blue, with white clouds, like a stairway to heaven.

At the foot of the stairway is a red-and-white bull's eye stained on a door. When you push the door open, it swings out to the center, blocking off the space; the space becomes longer or shorter, continuous or compartmented, according to the use of the doors.

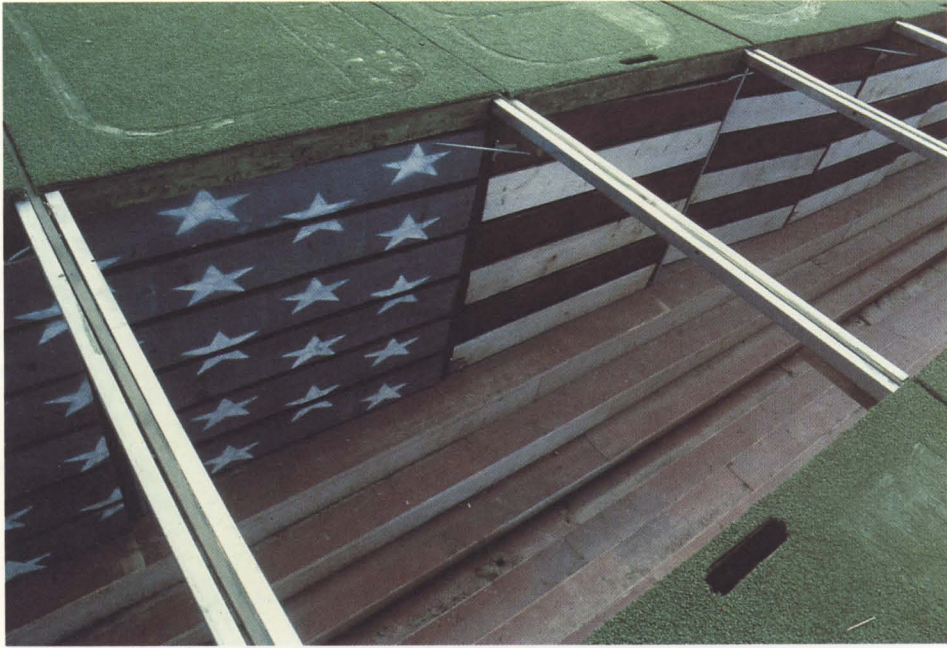
Now that you're downstairs, you're in a central corridor, with rooms on either side. Each room, like the long house itself, is an upside-down house: the roof that's now a floor is a stepped pyramid, the steps descending from dark brown at the top to light brown at the bottom, ending in a blue square in the middle, as if the sky is below. Black animal silhouettes are stained on the brown walls: rat, beaver, squirrel, rabbit, cat, deer, giraffe, kangaroo, camel, cougar, lion, hippopotamus, elephant, eagle. These are rooms below the normal human life above.

Each animal-room leads to a study-room, under the stairway. Near the entrance, a green bench — its back the underside of the stairway — faces a white grid on the wall; further in, near the far wall, a green bench — its back is the wall — faces a black grid on the underside of the stairway. Words are written as if on a crossword puzzle; a person sits crooked while reading a “straight” word, and straight while reading a “crooked” word: E-V-O-L-U-T-I-O-N or R-E-V-O-L-U-T-I-O-N; P-R-I-V-A-T-E or P-U-B-L-I-C; L-I-B-E-R-A-L or R-A-D-I-C-A-L; S-E-D-E-N-T-A-R-Y or N-O-M-A-D-I-C; S-O-L-D-I-E-R or G-U-E-R-I-L-L-A; F-A-M-I-L-Y or C-O-M-R-A-D-E; F-L-O-W-E-R-S or W-E-E-D-S; R-E-S-P-E-C-T or A-N-A-L-Y-Z-E; C-A-P-I-T-A-L or C-O-M-M-U-N-E; S-O-W or F-O-R-A-G-E; F-A-T-H-E-R or P-A-T-R-I-C-I-D-E; S-U-R-P-L-U-S or D-E-S-I-R-E; S-E-G-M-E-N-T or F-L-O-W.









## HOUSE ON THE GROUND

1986

Adobe brick

New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico

40" x 64' x 26'

The site is an empty lot on a college campus, in the Southwestern United States: the lot is used by students as a short-cut between buildings — there's a pathway that's been worn, after continuous use, into the ground.

A 4-level pueblo housing complex — a general example of those indigenous to the region — is pushed over onto the ground, just off the pathway; the front facade of the housing complex lies parallel to the ground, and functions now as the top of the structure.

Each level of the complex is a different height, ranging from 40 inches above-ground at the front (where the doorways are) to 8 inches below-ground at the rear. Each level, in turn, is divided into dwelling-units at different heights, low at the ends and high in the middle. The stripped roof-poles are vertical now, in this position, and stick up from the horizontal walls like markers: from the front, and in the middle, it's as if the dwelling is built in perspective — it recedes toward the rear, and off to each side, into the ground.

The doorways, on the ground, are niches that can be entered — inside the doorway, some walls are low enough to sit on and some are higher than a table (you have to lift yourself up onto it). You can step up onto the housing complex at either end, or at the back, where the walls are at the ground level or only 8 inches high; from there you can walk up and down from unit to unit, in and out of each unit. The windows are holes now, at your feet — you can step down into them, and sit as if inside the ground. Or you can stay outside and sit on a roof-pole, about 6 inches in diameter, that extends up from the walls below.





## HOUSE OF CARS

1983

Painted junk cars and car seats, steel

10 x 40 x 6'

A housing complex made up on junks car.

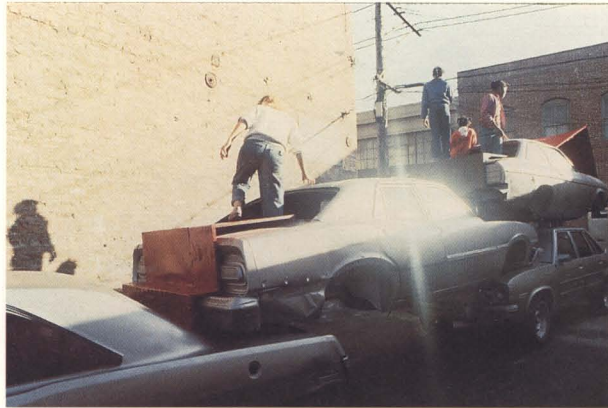
The complex is multi-level and linear; it's located where cars are accustomed to be — at curbside, like at parked car, or in a parking lot, within a parking space. The complex is duo-directional; the ground-level cars face one way, while the upper-level cars face the opposite way. The wheels are removed from the upper cars; in effect, "carried" by the lower cars. The cars are welded together, with an international structure; the cars are made uniform — they are all chrome-painted.

The ground-floor of the floor is made up, at one end, by a one-story car and, at the other end, by the first story of a two-story car. These two cars support the mezzanine-level car, which helps support the second floor of the two-story car

There's a front porch; the hood of each end-car is propped open: at the front, a car-seat is wedged inside — at the back, an awning connected to the hood makes a roof. The complex has two entrances: at the front, one open door into the one-story car, on one side — at the back, one open door into the first-story car, on the other side. The inside of each car — walls and furniture — is a single color.

The one-story car is red; two double car-seats, at right angles to each other, make an — shaped couch. A stairway goes out the back window and up into the back window of the mezzanine level car. The mezzanine-level car is black; two single car-seats face each other across a central aisle. A stairway goes out the front window and up into the back window of the second-story car. The second-story car is red; a car-seat faces a swing, made from a rubber tire, that hangs from the hood. A metal ladder goes through the open floor, and through the open roof of the first-story car. The first-story car is black; a single car-seat sits in front of a metal slab set into the back window — it makes a table — while in the front a foam mattress and pillow makes a bed under the hood.









ARCHITECTURE II  
CLOTHING & FURNITURE



## POCKET JEWELRY

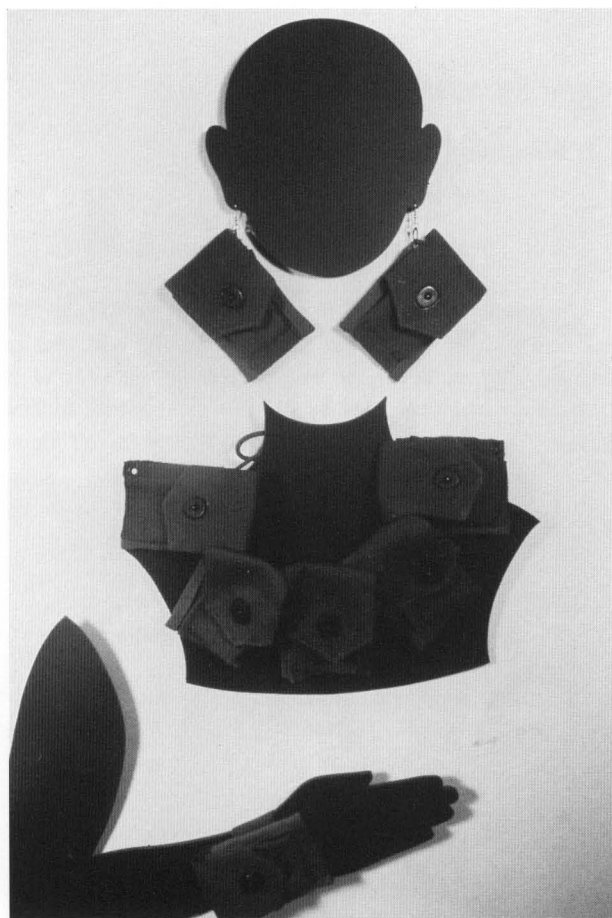
1984

Cartridge-belt pockets, earring-hooks, cord

3 x 1/2" x variable length

A set of ear-rings, a necklace and a bracelet made up of the pockets of a military cartridge-belt.

The pockets function as jewelry; the jewelry can be used as pockets.



## VIRTUAL INTELLIGENCE MASK

1993

Fencing mask televisions, radio, surveillance cameras

3 x 1 x 1 1/2'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Won Chang]

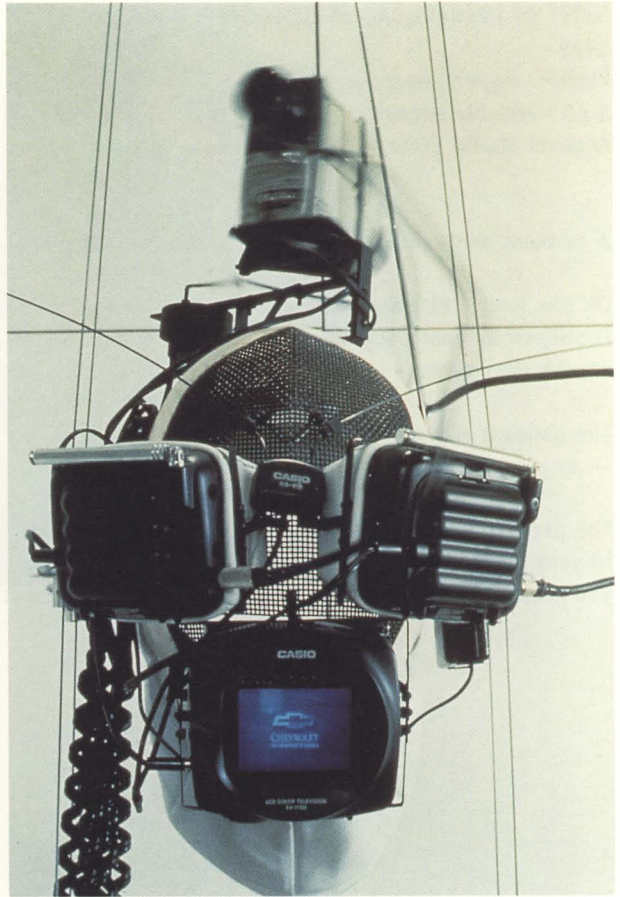
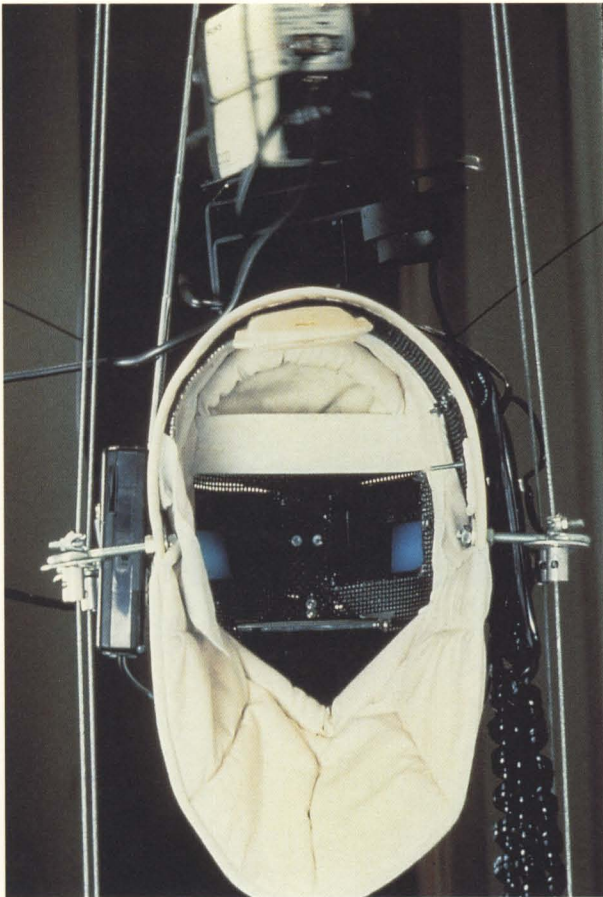
A conventional fencing mask is used as a support-structure for electronics; the electronics are used as contact with the world outside.

On the front of the mask are three televisions: one larger television facing out, and two miniature televisions facing in. The miniature televisions, facing in, cover the eyes of the person wearing the mask; from an outsider's point of view, the person inside the mask is blindfolded by the two televisions. At one side of the mask is a small portable radio, positioned at the ear of the person wearing the mask; the radio's speaker is directed out.

On top of the mask are two surveillance cameras, one on top of the other, one directed toward the front and one directed toward the rear. The cameras mechanically rotate, side to side.

The person wearing the mask sees his/her environment on the two televisionscreens in front of his/her eyes: one screen shows what's going on in front of the person, the other shows what's going on behind.

In the meantime, the larger television, and the radio, are available for use by passers-by: a passer-by can switch TV channels, a passer-by can change from one radio station to another. A passer-by can, literally, "dial" the person wearing the mask; a passer-by can, literally, "turn" the person on.



## SHIRT OF POCKETS/JACKET OF POCKETS

1993

Plastic, zippers, snaps

3 x 3 x variable depth

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Won Chang]

A garment made of 50 transparent plastic pockets, one pocket sewn to the other.

Off the body, the garment is a cross-shaped piece of double-sheet plastic with a slit in the middle. The garment is shaped by your body as you wear it: you slip your head through the slit, snap the front and back together around your torso, snap each cross-piece to itself around your arm to make a sleeve.

The garment is worn as either a shirt or a jacket. When it's worn as a shirt, the plastic exposes your underwear — or your naked body — underneath.

The pockets are zippered. What you have in your pockets is revealed through the plastic; you are what you have in your pockets. Whatever you have in each pocket blocks out that part of your body behind it; the more pockets you use, the less there is to see of your body underneath.





LADDER LOUNGE CHAIR

1984

Aluminum ladders, hinges

3 1/2 x 7 1/2 x 1 1/2'

An 11-foot ladder, in five irregularly sized sections, hinged together: the ladder can be folded out to form a lounge chair, or a beach chair.



## HEAD STORAGE

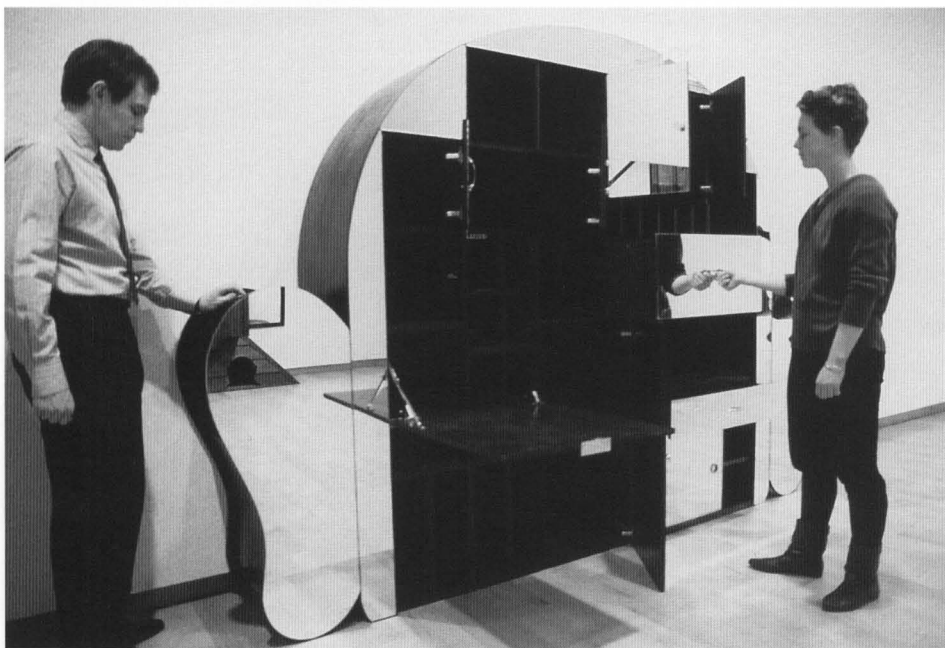
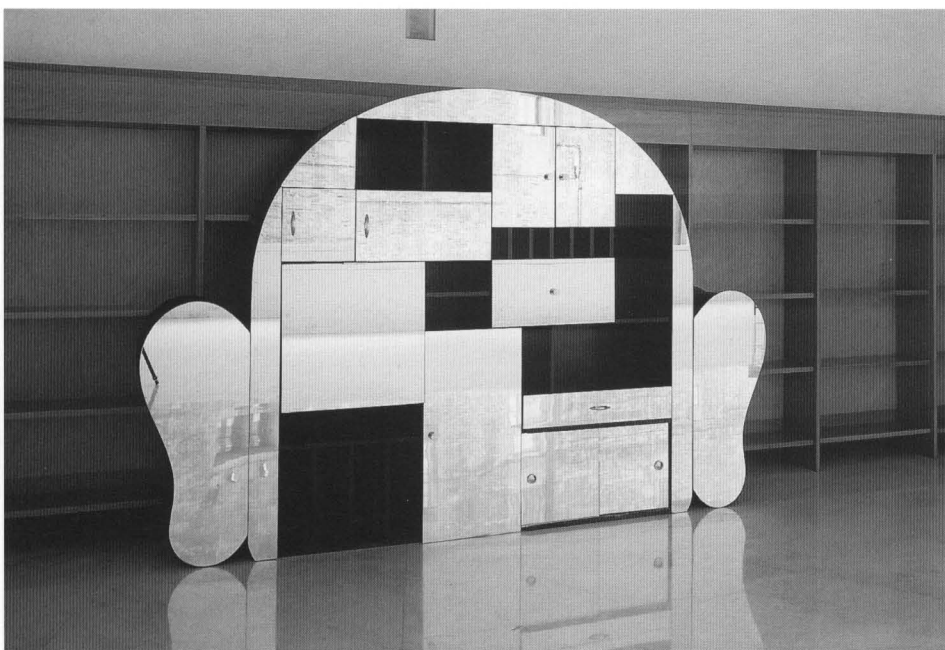
1984

Wood, glass mirrors, hinges, drawer-track

6 1/2 x 9 1/2 x 3 1/2"

A cabinet shaped like the top of a head. The cabinet is placed against the wall; the front is flat, like the wall pushed forward 18 inches, and mirrored: the room is swept in, the room expands into the head.

The front is divided into different-sized squares and rectangles. Some of them have no mirrored surface, and are further subdivided into shelves. The others, mirror-covered, have door-knobs and drawer-pulls: they can be pulled out, hinged down, swung open, in different directions, making accessible other storage units inside. At each end, a rolling door allows access into each ear. The inside of the cabinet is black-lacquered wood, like a black hole behind the mirror. Opening the cabinet pulls apart the head and breaks the reflections of the room, bring the user into the black hole.



MAZE TABLE

1985

Glass

2 1/2 x 15 x 15'

A set of 9 glass tables, each of them square and all of them arranged in a square; each table is surrounded by a glass bench, the bench continuous from table to table and surrounding the entire square of tables.

The floor, between the front of the bench and the table leg, is glass: it's as if a square glass volume has been cut into, leaving some sections table-high and some bench-high.

At each of the four corners the bench is cut, so that the table-set can be entered: a person sits and squeezes in between bench and table (the front of the bench slants in, to allow passage). A person sits on the bench and slides from one side of the table to another — or from one table to another, and then on to another, leaving one family unit and breaking in on another.





BIG BABY FLOOR

1985

Oak flooring, rubber

1 1/2 x 19 x 15"

A floor, in the shape of throw-rug, 18 inches high; the sides are slanted, at a 45-degree angle — the wood of the floor is directed toward whatever ground it's placed on.

This raised floor is cut into: cut-outs in the shape of overgrown babies, giant babies, 8 feet long. You can enter, go within the floor, through the babies; one baby is entered at the foot, one at the hand, one at the head. The interior of each baby, walls and floor, is lined with black rubber. Inside a baby, you can use the wood flooring as a seat; a rubber-covered step, 9 inches high, follows the curve of the baby's head — you can step up onto the wood floor, as if on the stage.



## ADJUSTABLE WALL BRA

1990-1991

Plaster, steel, cable, canvas, light, audio

Variable dimensions 8 x 21 x 3'

An edition of six bras for the wall. This is a bra that's worn by a wall; the bra is the height of a conventional wall, and is made like a wall, skinned with metal lathe covered with a rough coat of plaster.

The bra is multi-functional fixture for the home; it functions as lighting, audio-speakers, and furniture. From inside each cup, light spills out past the uneven plaster edges and through the metal lathe, onto the wall around it and into the room. The bra has its own sound, steady breathing that pans from cup to cup, into which is mixed input from any conventional sound-source — radio, stereo system, television — which is heard with an undercurrent of heavy breathing. Inside each cup a canvas backing, like the lining of a bra, forms a sling seat.

The bra is used as a wall-fixture or a room-divider; the cups are hinged so that the bra can be adjustable to different positions relative to a wall — lines of cable act as shoulder-straps that tie the bra to floor and ceiling and support the bra in its various configurations.

In its basic frontal position, one cup is stood next to the other, against the wall and facing out, like bulges from the wall. Or one cup might be turned out from the wall, at a forty-five degree angle — a person might go around and sit, coddled, inside the bra. If both cups are slanted out from the wall, away from each other, a person can sit in each cup, sitting in the same bra but separate from one another, as if in a private capsule. If the bra is pushed into a corner, one cup on one wall is squeezed against the other cup on the adjacent wall. Or the bra might make its own corner, one cup at the right angle to a wall while the other cup is at right angle to the first, forming a room. If the bra is re-oriented, one cup might be set up against a wall while the other sits pushed up against it on the floor. Or the wall cup can be tilted out, at a sixty-degree angle, so that a person can squeeze in and sit inside, close to the wall and secluded; another person, in the meantime, might be sitting on the floor cup, as if on a mound of earth; the floor cup, too, might be tilted, up at a thirty degree angle, so that a person can crawl under it and use it as a tent. Or the cup on the wall might be tilted up until it's at the right angle with the other cup, standing on the floor: a person might sit inside the standing cup, facing the wall, under the roof of the wall cup above. If the wall is high enough, one cup might be fixed higher up on the wall so that the lower cup can lean against the wall, at a forty-five degree angle, as a lean-to shelter. Or the bra might be lifted up as high as possible, with one cup flat up against the ceiling and pushed up by the other cup against the wall just below it.



## MULTI-BEDS

1991

Galvanized steel, nylon bedspread, foam, acrylic panels, light, cable, winches

4 1/2 x 3 x 6 1/2'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Brownie Johnson, Jenny Schrider]

Five types of interconnected single beds; each type makes a different arena for a relationship.

The headboard of each bed is a mirror outside and a plane of light inside, while the footboard is the reverse. The mattress is covered with the heavy gray nylon conventionally used for tumbling mats.

MULTI-BEDS 1 and 2 are static, while Multi-Beds 3, 4 and 5 are movable. The movable beds are joined to each other and to ceiling by cable; winches hang above, or are attached to, the beds.

1: Two beds crossed so that they are fused together and share a middle. If two people lie down, one on each bed, they have to lie on top of each other in order to fit.

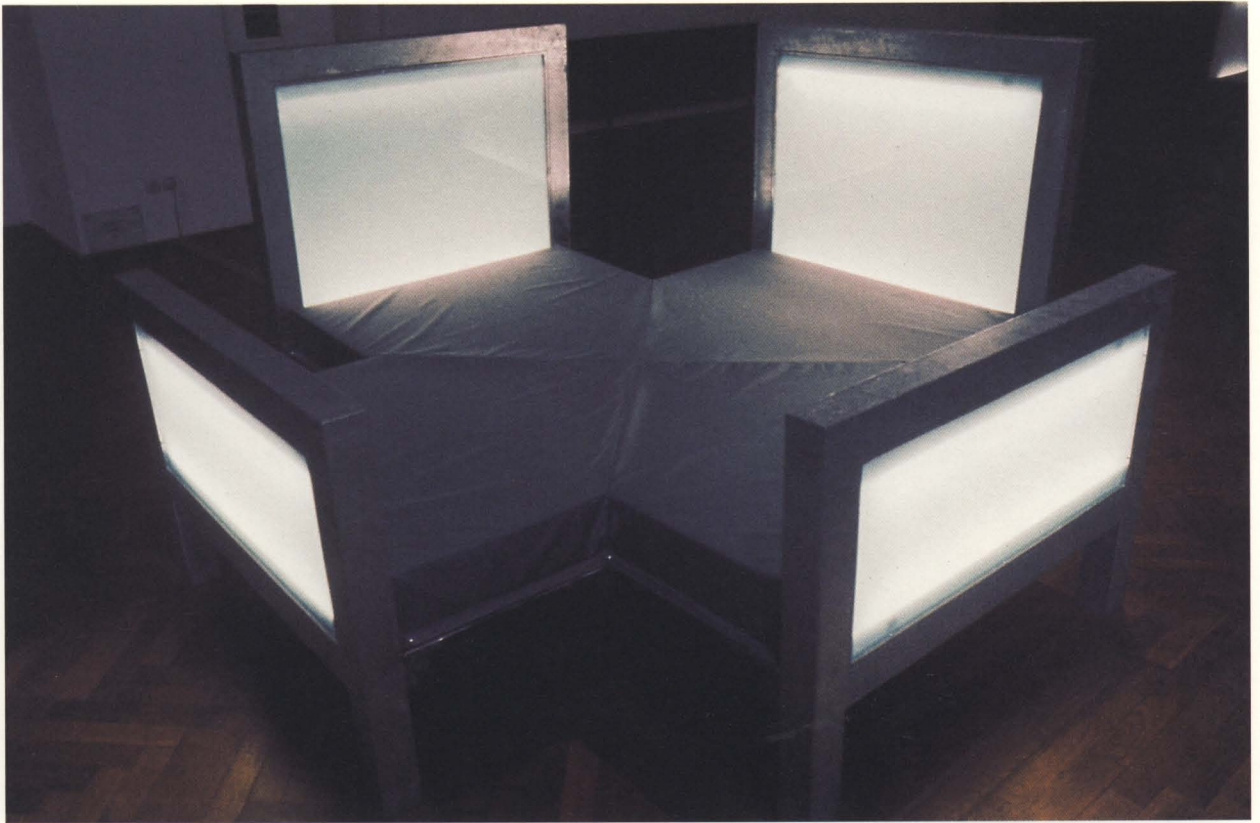
2: Two beds crossed so that the top half of each bed is pulled apart from the lower half. Lying down on either bed, a person might drop through the gap — it would be easier to use each bed as seat rather than as a bed.

3: Two beds sharing a common footboard and connected end to end. One winch raises the common footboard: each person lies on a bed face down and feet up, out of sight of each other. The other winch raises each headboard: the two people come together feet-to-feet, and face each other.

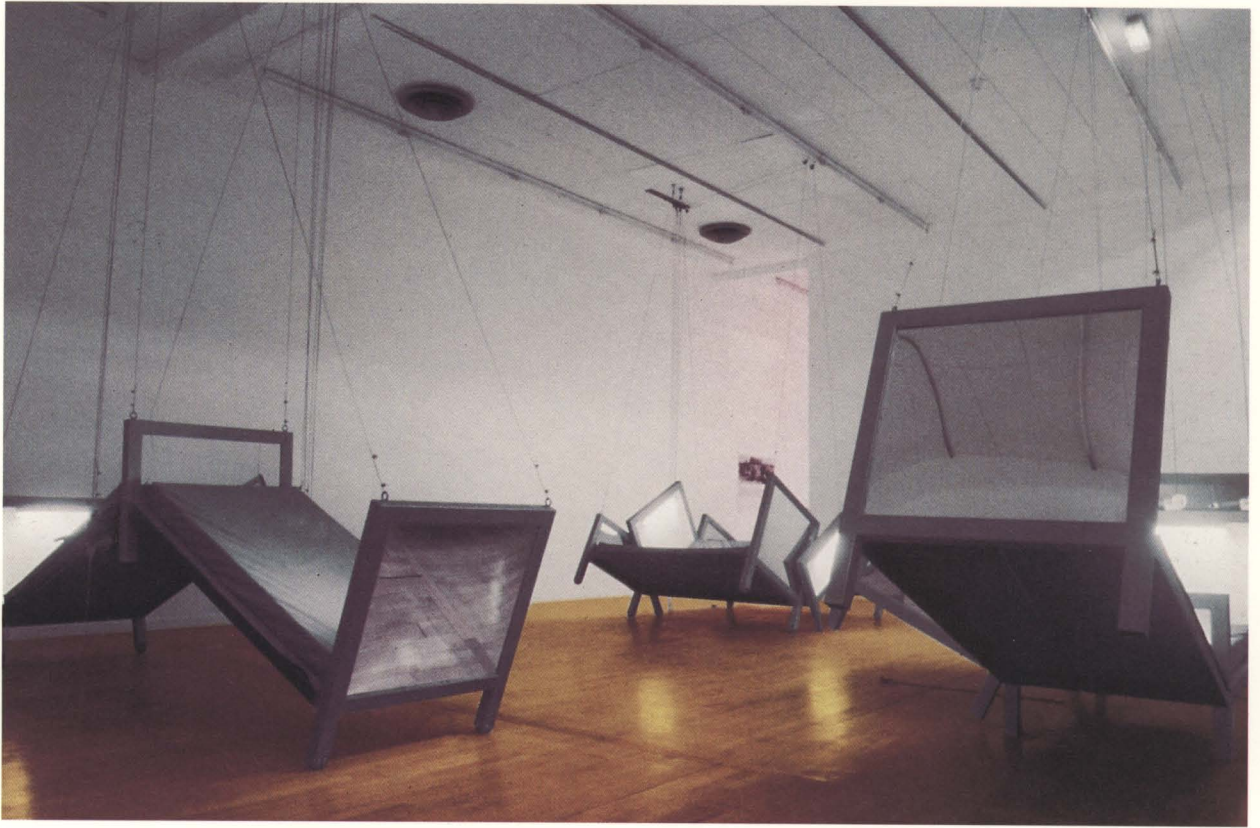
4: Three beds connected side-to-side, headboard next to footboard next to headboard. The winch squeezes the three beds together, accordion-like. If two people lie down on the beds that tilt away from each other, they have hold onto each other, as if for dear life, or else one of them will fall off the bed.

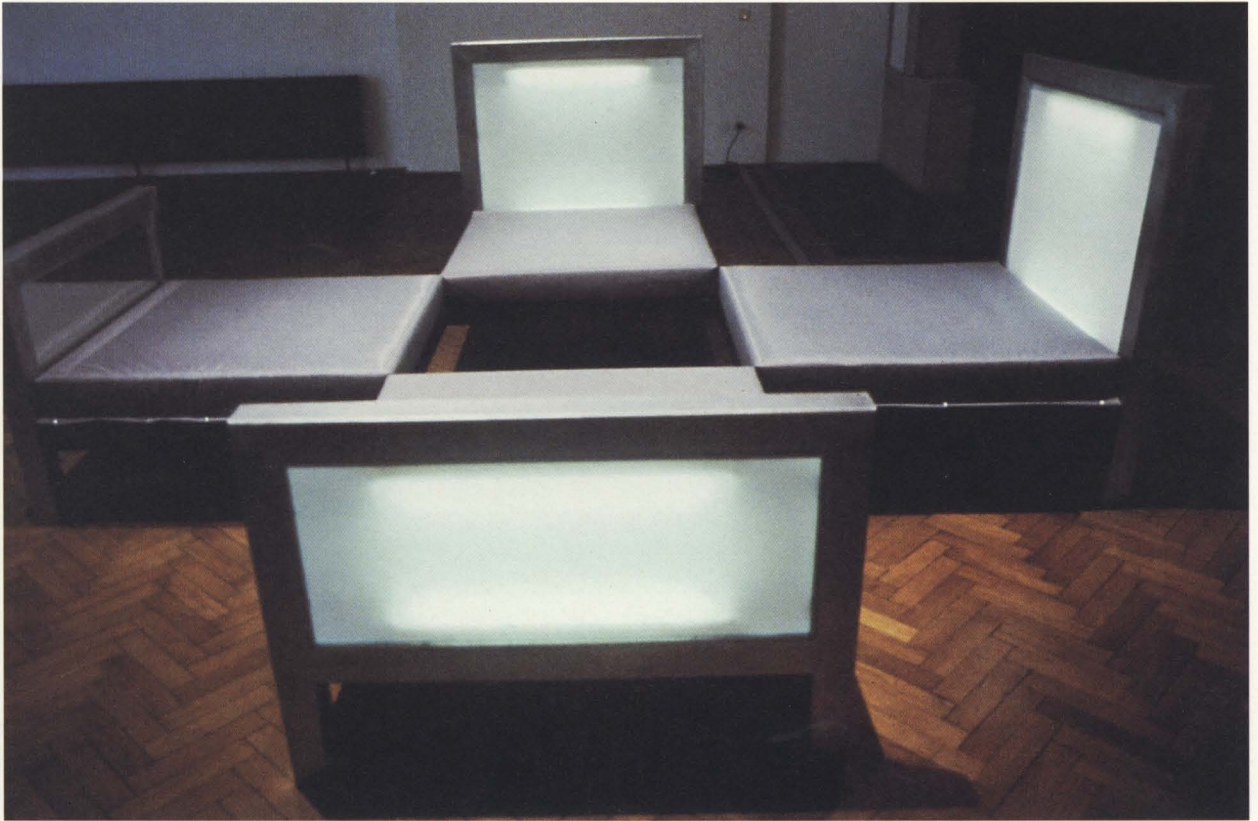
5: A bed surrounded by beds: one bed at each end and another bed at one side. One winch raises the bed at the headboard: its footboard is lifted, it slants down toward the headboard of the surrounded bed. The second winch raises the bed at the footboard: its headboard is lifted, it slants away, up over the footboard of the surrounded bed. The third winch raises the bed alongside the footboard, while its footboard comes in toward the headboard. When all three winches are operated, the person on the fixed bed is invaded by the surrounding beds (one person drives down at the head, while another falls in from the side, while another stands guard at the feet)











## FLUORESCENT FURNITURE

1992

Aluminum, fluorescent-light tubes

Modular sofa:  $3\frac{1}{2} \times 6 \times 2'$ ; table and chair:  $2\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{1}{2} \times 2'$ ; bed:  $2 \times 6\frac{1}{2} \times 3'$ ; extendable ladder-back chair: variable height by  $1\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{1}{2}'$

Furniture that functions also as light; light that functions also as furniture.

The furniture is made up of store-bought fluorescent light-tubes. Each light-tube is sandwiched between two plates of aluminum, so that a person sits on top of the light, inside the light, without the body touching the light-tubes.









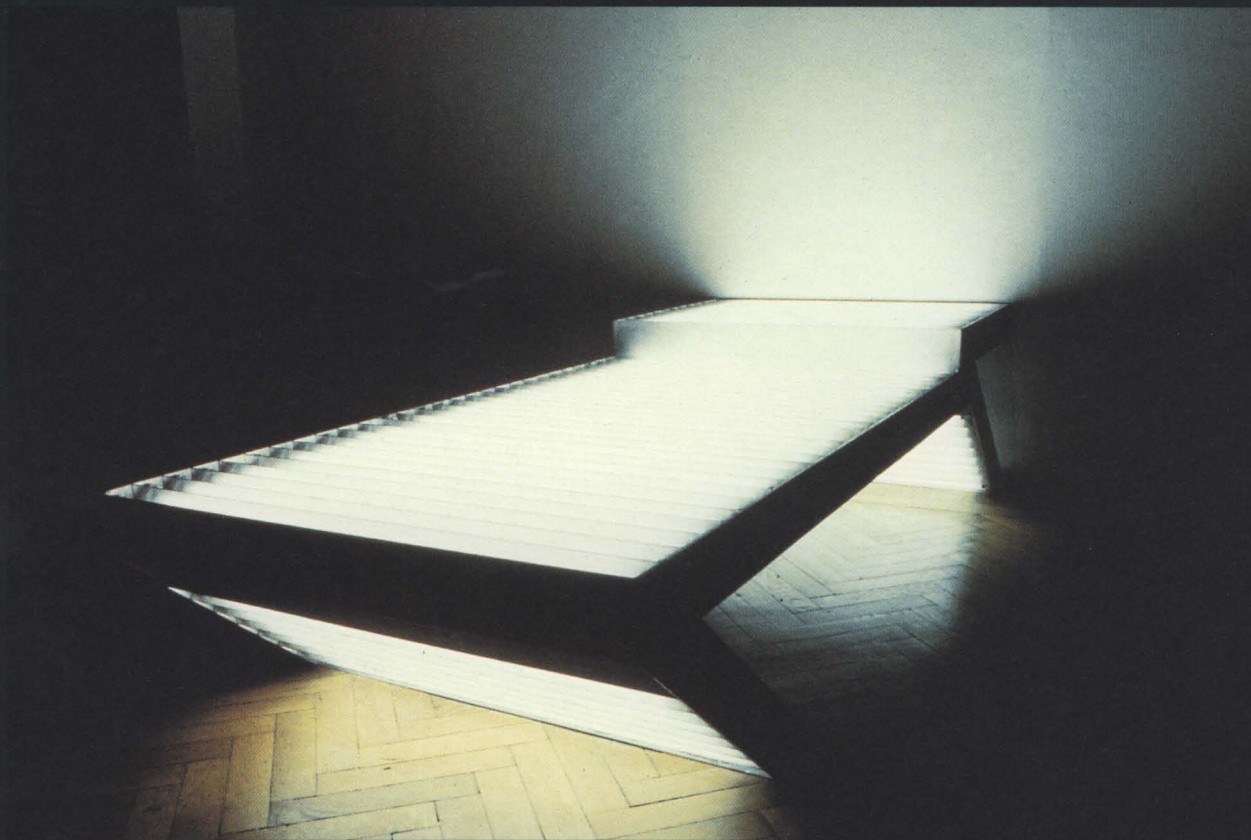












ARCHITECTURE III  
TRANSPORTATION (NODES & VEHICLES)

## LOLOMA TRANSPORTATION CENTER

1995–1997

Concrete, grass, trees, glass, steel

Scottsdale, Arizona

40 x 290 x 320'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Jenny Schrider, Charles Doherty, Devin O'Neill]; in collaboration with Douglas Sydnor and Angela Dye

**SITE:** A former parking lot, a lowland against a background of mountains in a hot climate.

**PROGRAM:** A plaza that functions also as a bus station. A clock tower should be visible from a distance, as sign. Shade should be provided by overhangs and by an abundance of trees.

**PROJECT:** Architecture from the ground up: the pavement folds up to make buildings and furniture; the floor of the site turns into roofs.

To make continuous shade, trees are planted in rings: the concrete pavement is inscribed in three sets of concentric circles, like targets, alternating rings of red and beige like the soil of the American southwest — here and there, the pavement folds up to make benches, leaving room for soil and ground-cover and trees.

The pavement spreads from the sidewalk onto the street. Each center of three sets of circles is a vanishing point for buildings, built in forced perspective. As the pavement folds up, a cut-out is folded back, to make a doorway — this fold holds a clock that faces outward, toward the street.

Throughout the Transportation Center, the circular pavement folds up to make the back walls and roofs of different buildings at one end, a passenger services building, with glass walls (behind the building, pavement folds up to make benches that surround a food court); in the middle, an outdoor gathering place, left free for flexible use; around the edge, three bus shelters on one side and one on the other (inside each shelter, the pavement that comes in from the vanishing point folds up to make a bench). On all the buildings, as the pavement folds up a section of it is folded back, to make an alternate entrance and exit.

The folds turn inward, to form a plaza, and outward, to meet transportation.







FLYING FLOOR FOR U.S. AIRWAYS TICKETING PAVILION, TERMINAL B/C, PHILADELPHIA AIRPORT

1995–1998

Painted steel, terrazzo, carpet, plantings, light

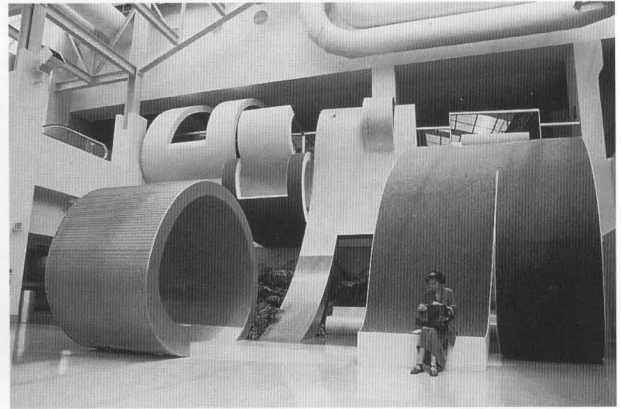
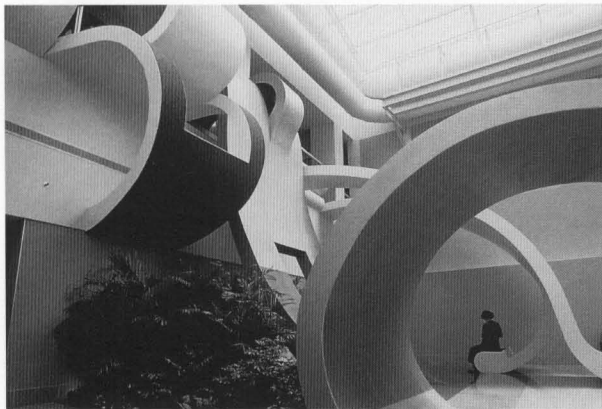
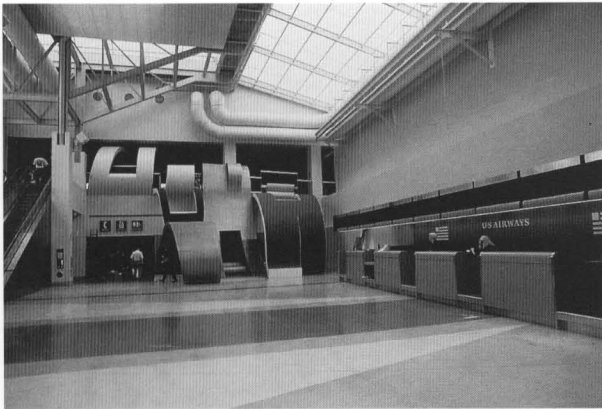
28 x 31 x 18'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Celia Imrey, Darío Núñez, Jenny Schrider, Charles Doherty, Saija Singer]

At the end of the ticketing pavilion, the floors come loose. It's as if, now that there's nowhere else to go, the floors take off in flight. The ground floor swoops up onto the mezzanine, while the mezzanine sweeps down onto the ground floor. The flying floors release plantings from under the ground, as if a jungle was there all the time, waiting to spring out; as the floors fly, they form seats for people within the plantings, and up in the air, and under the floor. The end of the ticketing pavilion is turned into an indoor park.







## MOBILE LINEAR CITY

1991

Truck tractor and flat bed, corrugated galvanized steel, grating, chain

13 x 22 x 130'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Jenny Schrider]

A city packed into storage: six housing units telescoped into one, a semi-trailer hooked up to a tractor that travels as a conventional truck.

When the truck is parked, the city can be pulled out: each unit slides on track attached to the walls of the next larger unit — each unit, in turn, is slid out far enough so that its support-legs can be folded down and fixed to the ground — the truck is driven forward, then, so that the unit is released.

The houses are sheathed in corrugated steel; the sheathing is cut on sections, hinged so that they can fold down inside and out. A gangplank folds down outside, leaving an open doorway; from under the gangplank, a ladder folds down onto the ground. Inside each house, different-sized wall panels fold down to make a table and bench, a bed, a shelf.

Each unit is walled off from the next; the units function as individual houses in the city. The end walls of each unit are either mirrored or translucent: some reflect back on their interiors, while some look shadowly into their neighbors'.

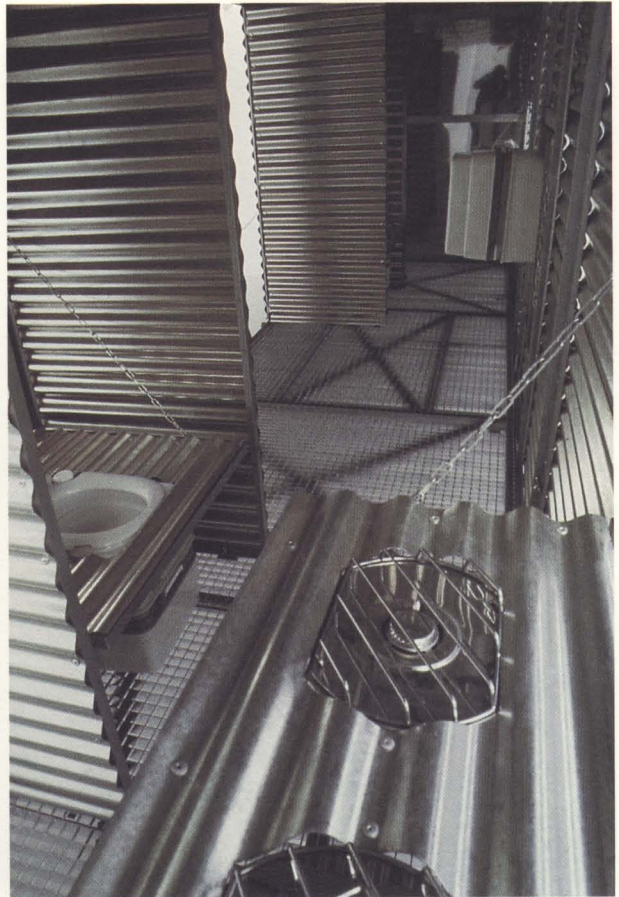
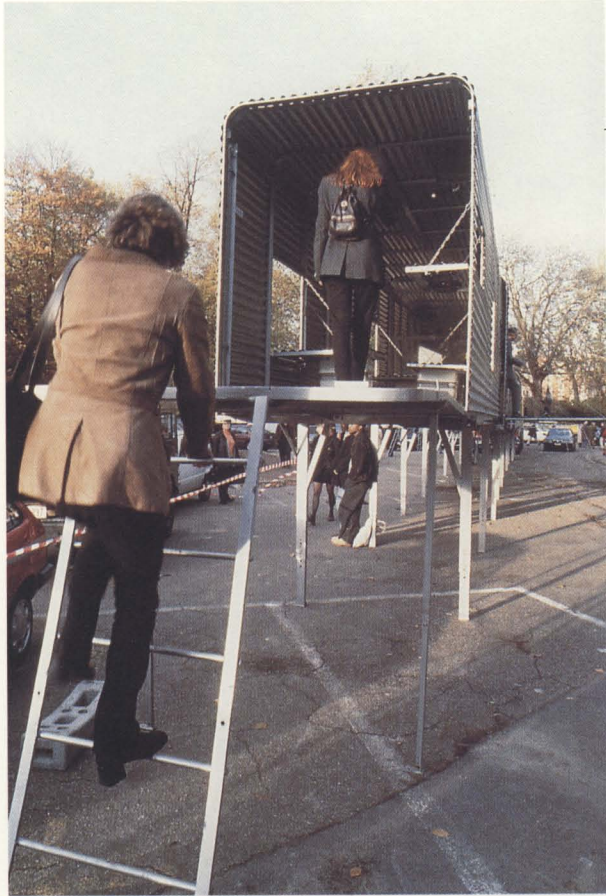
The last unit, the smallest unit, functions as a community service center. The panels here hinge down to provide toilet, stove, refrigerator. Panels fold in vertically, making shower stalls, and stalls around the toilets. The end wall folds down to make a back porch, from which a ladder folds down onto the ground.

The floors are steel grating; light comes up across the underside, lighting each unit from below.









PERSONAL ISLAND

1992

Aluminium rowboats, soil, grass, trees

"Floriade", Zoetemeer, The Netherlands

10 x 12 x 36'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Jenny Schriber, Lisa Albin]

SITE: An international garden show, inside a large park. The park is bordered, and cut through, by water.

PROGRAM: A temporary installation, for four months, during the garden show.

PROJECT: A portable island.

On the land, a rowboat is sunk into the ground; its bow is filled with soil and grass, a tree growing out of the bow; the oars are embedded in the ground, as if rowing on land. You can step down into the boat, and sit inside, as if the land were water.

Facing this boat, in the water, is its mirror-image: a rowboat wedged into a circular plane of grass: as in the rowboat on shore, its bow is filled with soil and grass, a tree growing out of the bow.

You can step out onto the grass plane, and into the boat, and row: the boat takes with it the circular plane of grass — it pulls out of a semi-circular cut in the shore — you can row your island out to sea.















## JAPANESE CAR GARDEN

1994

1 Japanese car, 6 Sony televisions (27"-20"-13"-9"-5"), sand, plexiglass, mirrored stainless steel

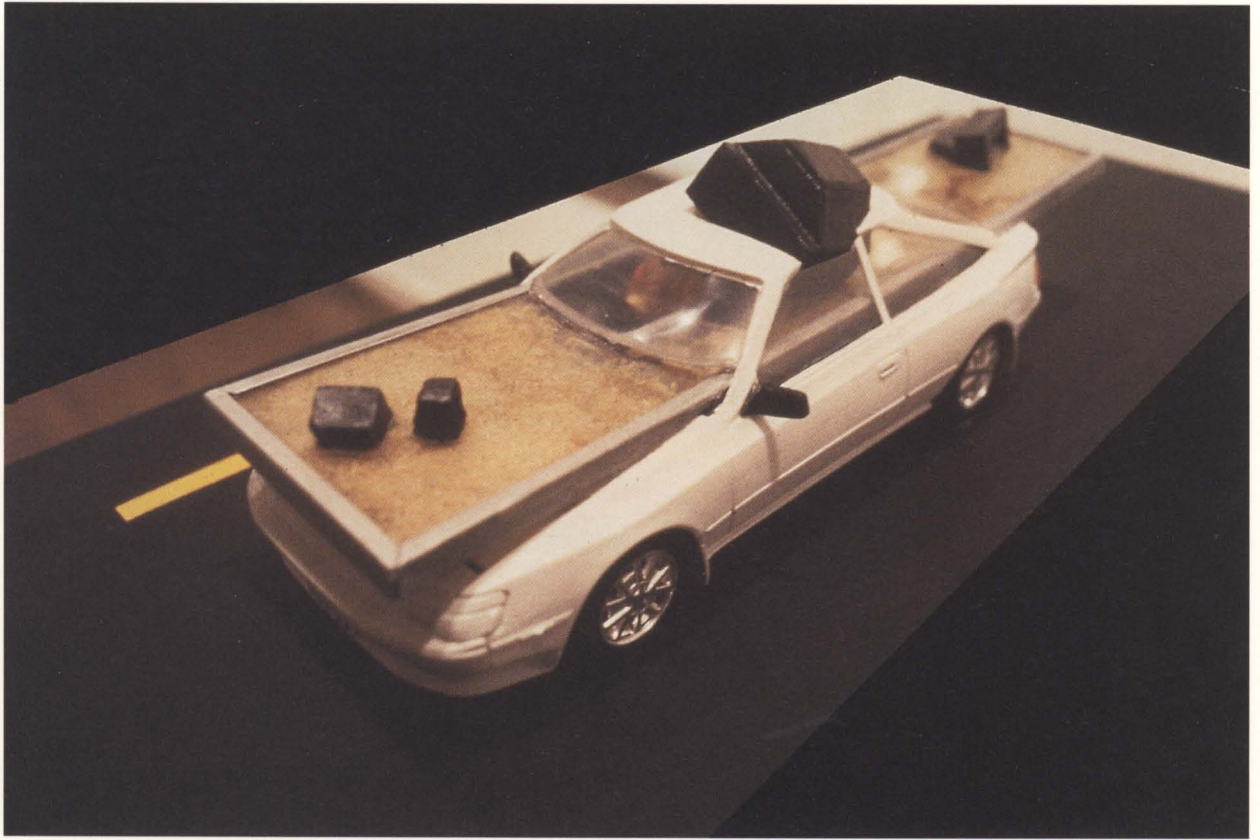
A car functions as part of a Japanese dry garden; the car carries the garden.

A plane of sand passes through the car: it sits on the hood — it fills the inside of the cab in an L-shape, leaving room for the driver — it cantilevers out from the trunk. The plane of sand is a thin transparent box, a container of sand; the frame is mirrored stainless steel, reflecting a sliver of what's outside. The plane is built specifically for a particular car; it's divided into three parts, outside and inside the car — the hood and the trunk can still be opened with the plane of sand attached.

Coming up through the sand are six televisions, planted in clusters: two small TV's over the end of the hood — three TV's, big and small, inside the car (the big TV cuts through the roof) — one big TV cantilevered out from the trunk. The televisions are embedded at different angles, the screens facing different directions; the screens don't have to be seen, there's no need for sound; the TV's are used as the rocks of a Japanese garden.

The sand is loose inside its container; the plane is only three-quarters filled with sand; the sand shifts as the car moves. The televisions show conventional channels, broadcast television; the programs change, hour by hour, day by day, but the programming stays the same.

As you drive the car, you're sitting in the middle of a Japanese garden. If you're standing on the sidewalk, the Japanese garden passes you like a ship in the night. If you're in another car, you might try to keep up with the garden — you're trailing it, it's right beside you, neck and neck, it's in view but just out of reach — until it turns the corner, and disappears like a ghost.





ARCHITECTURE IV  
PLAZAS & PARKS

## FLOOR CLOCK

1989

Concrete, steel, clock mechanism

Temporary installation for Equitable Building Plaza, Chicago

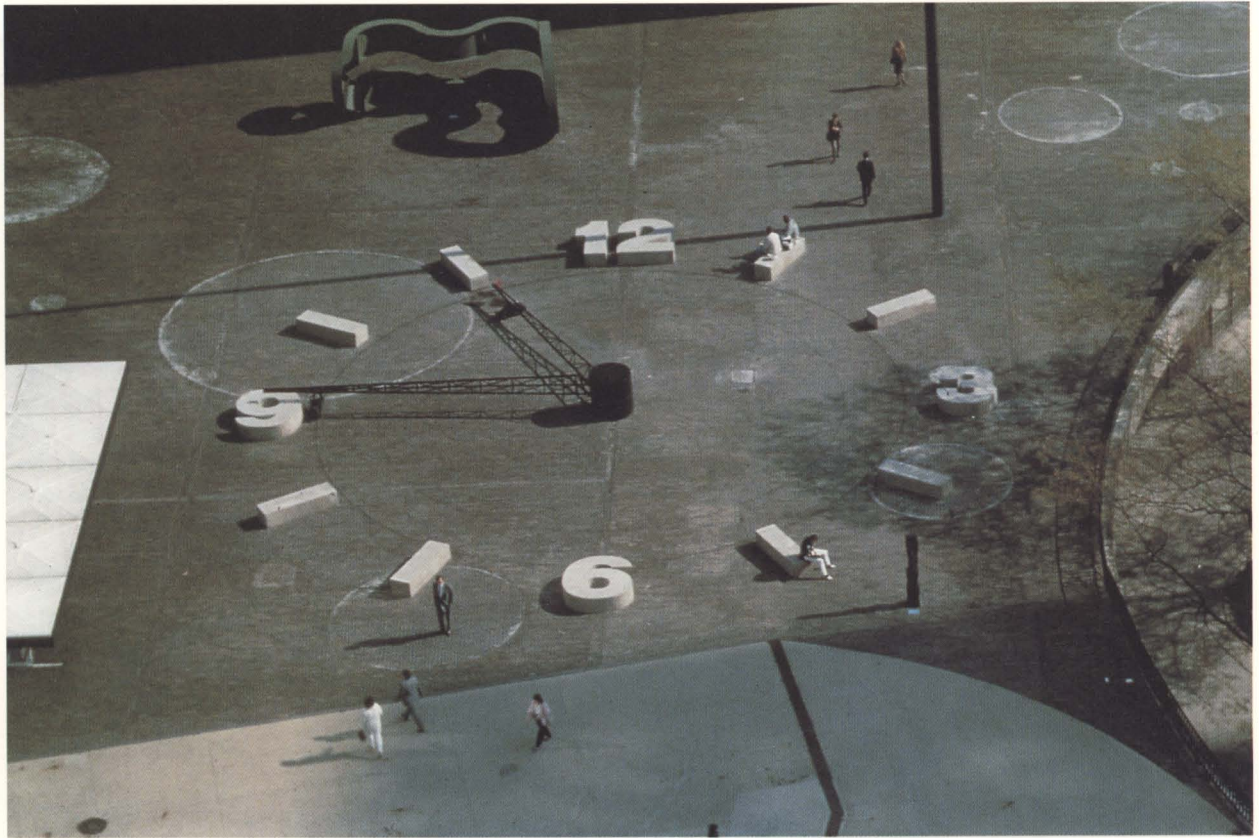
4 x 70 x 70'

The face of a clock, seventy feet in diameter, is superimposed on the floor of a plaza.

The numbers are light gray concrete, and are about sixteen inches high; the hands of the clock are black steel trusses, and move off a central black steel cylinder about four feet high.

The floor of the plaza becomes the face of the clock. Set down on the existent ground of the plaza, whatever it happens to be, the numbers and the hands of the clock mark out a circle inside the square.

The numbers function as seats. The minute hand, as on a conventional clock, cross over half the number as it passes: you can sit, but not for too long — you have no more than fifty-nine minutes, before the minute hand comes by and nudges you off your seat.





## PROPOSAL FOR A PLAYING FIELD

1988

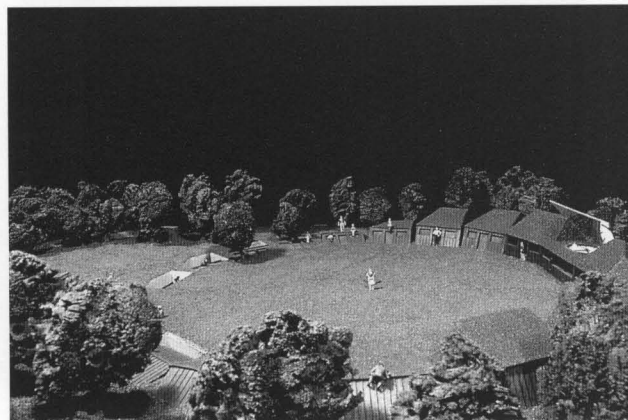
Wood, concrete, shingles

Private estate, Mc Lean, Virginia

20 x 120 x 90'

The site is on private land, a clearing in the woods at the foot of a slope. Left abandoned on the site is an old wooden house, built in three sections, pitched roof at each end and a flat roof in the middle. The program is: to make a playing field for children.

The proposal is to build an amphitheater, using the old house as a building-block. The end-section of the house, on each side, is replicated; the houses are formed into an oval; on one side each successive house leans further back, on the other side each successive house tilts further forward, gradually sinking into the ground. The sinking houses are climbed over; they can be used as spectators's seats, around the playing field, or they can be used as part of the playing field, as playground equipment. The old house at the end is lit from inside, making a light-source for the playing field; a clock is set down, horizontally, on the flat roof, a mirror tilted above it: the time can be read in the mirror, but the hands of the clock are moving backwards — since this is a place for children, time can't go forward, time turns back to childhood.



PROPOSAL FOR NORTH CAROLINA REVENUE BUILDING, RALEIGH

1991

Glass block, mirrored stainless steel, concrete, granite, light

6 x 12 x 448'

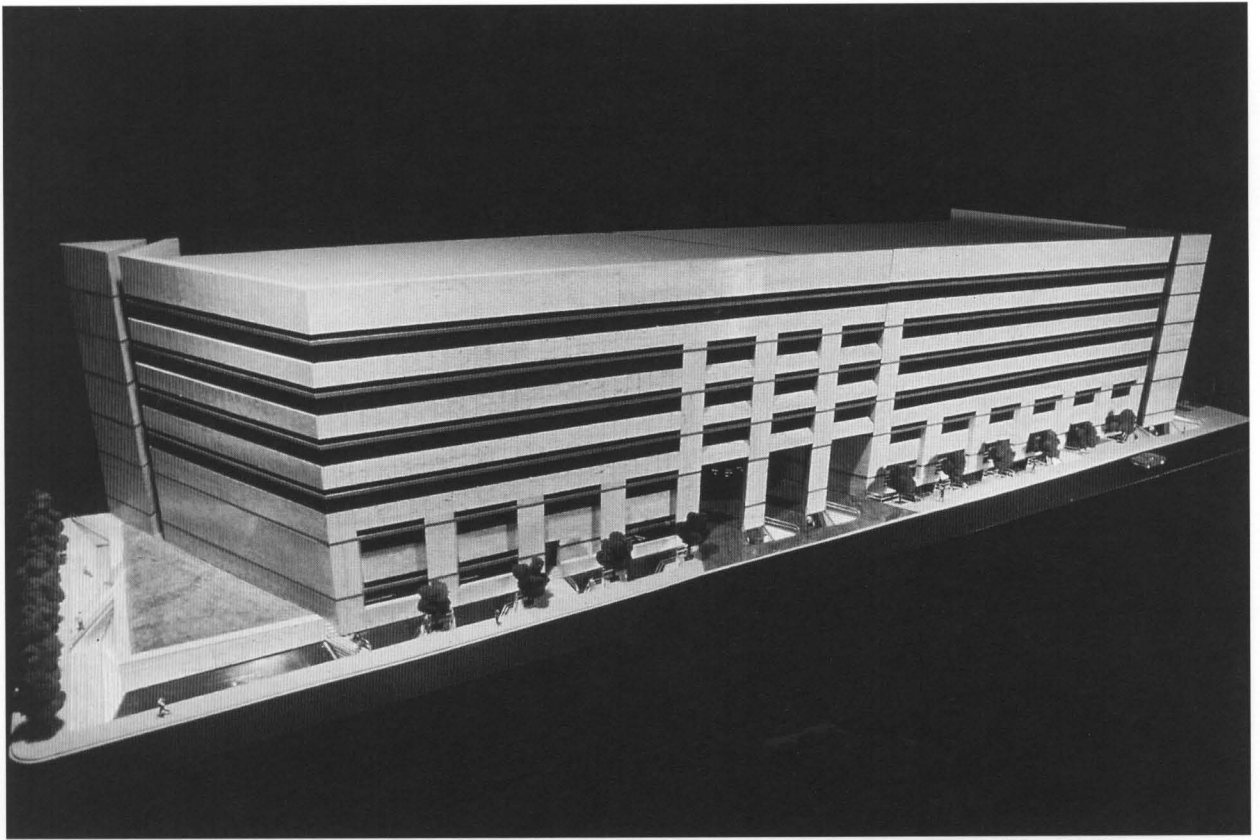
Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Brownie Johnson, Jenny Schrider]

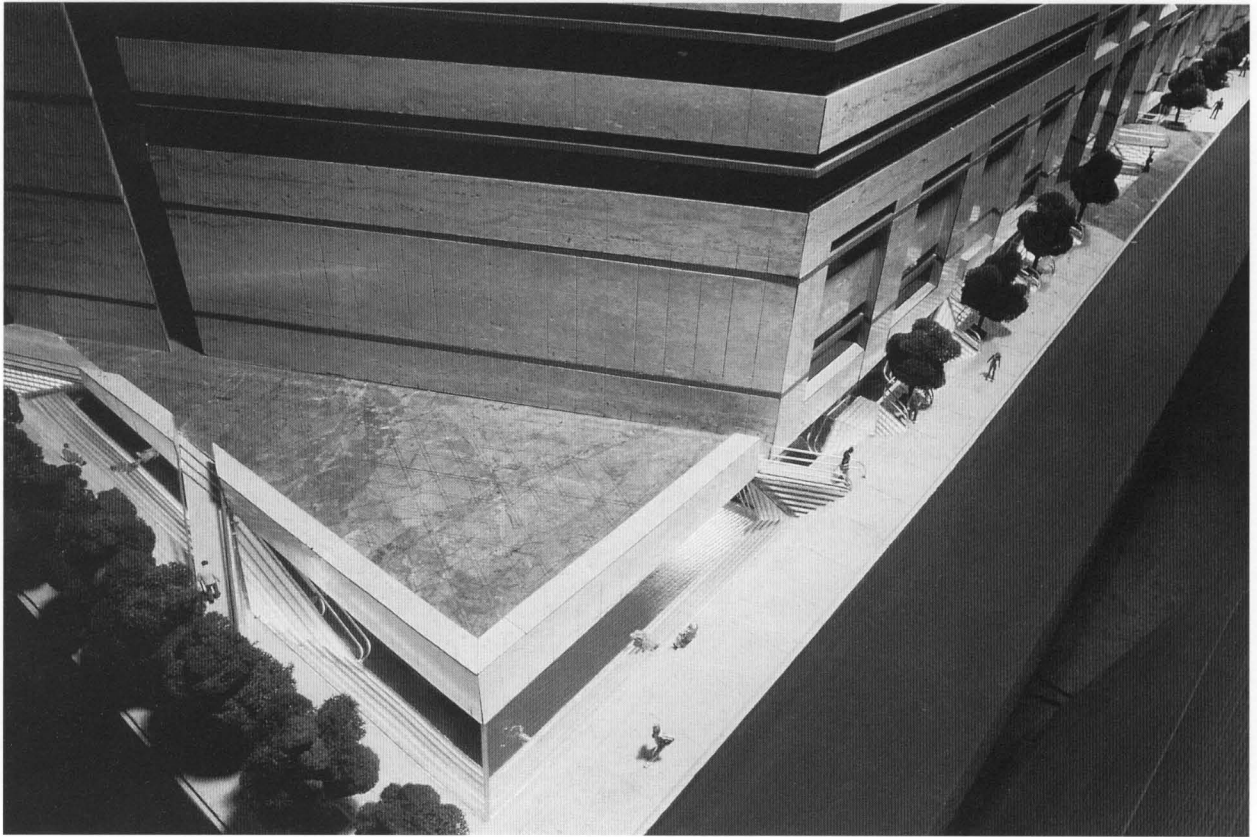
The site is a government building, parallelogram-shaped and five stories high; the parallelogram is converted into a rectangle by walled triangular plazas on either end of the building. The back of the building is an arcade that faces a park; the front, and the sides, are on city sidewalks.

The proposal digs a hole around the block of the building, and turns it into an island.

A cut is made around the building, along the front and the sides, twelve feet wide and six feet deep. Under the building, a mirror slants out at a forty-five degree angle: six steps descend from the sidewalk to meet the mirror. The cut is interrupted by walkways into the plazas and through the building, and by trees on the sidewalk: the paved areas around trees extend six feet across the cut, like promontories. The steps bring the sidewalk down into the ground, as if into a well: the one-foot-wide treads are concrete, like the sidewalk, or granite, like the floor of the building entrance. The risers, and the walls of the stairwell, are glass blocks lit from within.

The slanted mirror, below the building, reflects the sky and people passing by on the sidewalk. The building is rid of its government armor, and opened to its surroundings: people walk down into the stairwell and sit and gather over the steps — the face-to-face reflections make a cocoon of intimacy. The mirror draws the sky, and people, under the building and into it; they become part of the building, and undermine it. At night, the mirrored stairwell is turned on into a sea of light that the building floats on.









## DIRT WALL FOR THE ARVADA ART CENTER

1991

Earth, glass, galvanized steel

24 x 352 x 4'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Jenny Schrider, Lisa Albin]

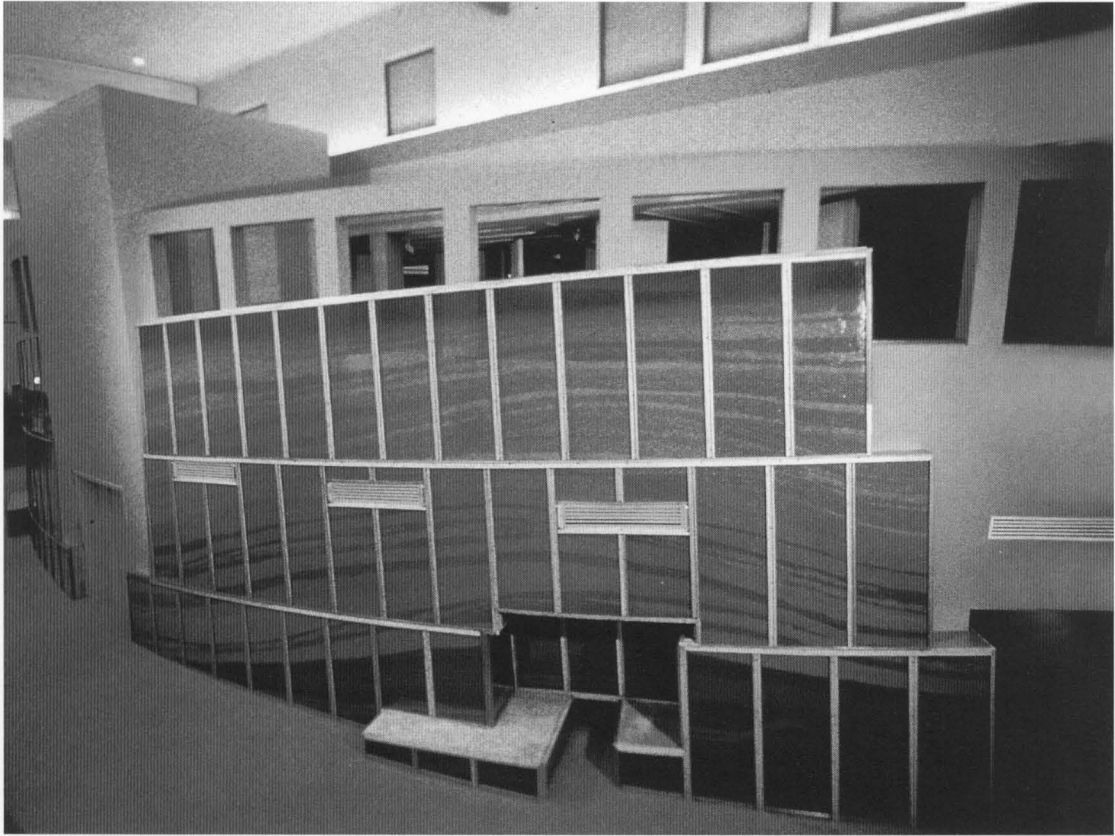
The site is a concrete wall that winds from outside the building through to the inside. The wall, modelled by the architect on a G-clef, is designed to announce the centers function as museum and school for the arts; the wall is cut by windows and doorways and atirs as it winds through the building, joining exhibition-spaces to classrooms to offices; the wall starts, outside, from a brick-paved spiral on the ground.

The proposal brings the ouside inside; it brings the ground up onto what's built on the ground.

Starting at the brick-paved spiral, the ground is gradually raised up off the ground: on each side a glass retaining wall, slanted inward, holds the earth back, brings the earth up and forward — a wall of earth rises diagonally, following the spiral and hugging the concrete wall, sandwiching it. The earth wall takes to the concrete wall and is carried along with it into the building. The earth wall keeps spreading over the concrete wall until, at the end, it rises above it.

The earth wall follows the peculiarities of the concrete wall and the spaces it goes through: when the concrete wall splits and wings out at a central staircase, the earth wall shifts from one wing to the other — in a classroom with cabinets, the earth wall is squeezed behind the cabinets — when the earth wall passes over doorways and windows in the concrete wall, cuts are made in the concrete wall, according to its diagonal orientation, that correspond to and at the same time collide with the openings in the concrete wall.

The earth wall is a ground to use and be part of: a section swings out, at the bottom, to form a bench of earth — a niche is cut out, making a seat inside the earth. The earth wall is usable like any other wall: paintings, for example, might be hung on the wall, or in the cuts within the wall.







## SCHOOL ON THE GROUND

1991–1995

Stamped concrete, stainless steel, plantings

Lafontaine & Arthur Avenue, Bronx, New York

2 x 64 x 75'

New York City Percent For Art Program; Art in Public Schools

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Brownie Johnson, Jenny Schrider]

**SITE:** The courtyard of an elementary school; on one side is a four-story classroom building, on the other a two-story gym/cafeteria, with a two-and-three-story bridge building in between.

**PROGRAM:** Seating and planting for the courtyard.

**PROJECT:** The school buildings are brought down to the ground. The walls of the surrounding buildings are replicated and transformed into the floor of the courtyard.

The fallen walls overlap each other. The gym/cafeteria is laid down first, then the classroom building on top of it, then the bridge building over the other two. Each overlapping wall is edged with a stainless-steel strip, shining in the light, that separates it from the wall beneath.

The windows, now that they've dropped to the ground, are turned into black concrete, glittering with bits of mica within; the window frames and mullions on the ground are blue, like those on the walls above. Some of the windows are raised up off the ground, to heights of eight inches, sixteen inches, twenty-four inches; some of these now can be used as seats, or blocks to climb over, while other functions as planters, the shrubbery shooting up wild between the mullions. The sides of the window/benches, and the window/planters, are blue concrete, like the frames and mullions; it's as if the frames and mullions are extruded up from the ground, from the wall that lies flat on the ground.

The walls that rise up above children have come down to earth, and into their hands; the walls that enclose children, inside, have become the ground that children walk over and play on, outside.





## EXTRA SPHERES FOR KLAPPER HALL

1993–1995

Fiberglass, acrylic panels, concrete finish, fluorescent light

Queens College, CUNY, New York (New York State Dormitory Authority)

10' 6" x 80' x 160'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Won Chang, Robert Bedner]

**SITE:** A plaza in front of the English Department building. On either side of the stairway up to the building, a pedestal holds a concrete sphere, three feet nine inches in diameter. Until now, the plaza has been used only as a pass-through place, a circulation route through the campus, with a stop-off at the building; the spheres make a grand entrance to what is, in fact, just the entrance to an English-Department building — the spheres are isolated, and lonely in the plaza.

**PROJECT:** the existent spheres are subsumed into a field of spheres. Additional spheres, the same material as the existent spheres and ranging from one foot two inches to ten feet six inches, are dropped into the plaza; the existent spheres fit into the range of sizes.

The new spheres are cut into, so that they're usable as furniture; the cuts are sheeted with frosted acrylic panels — light shines from within the spheres, providing illumination for the furniture and additional light for the plaza at night.

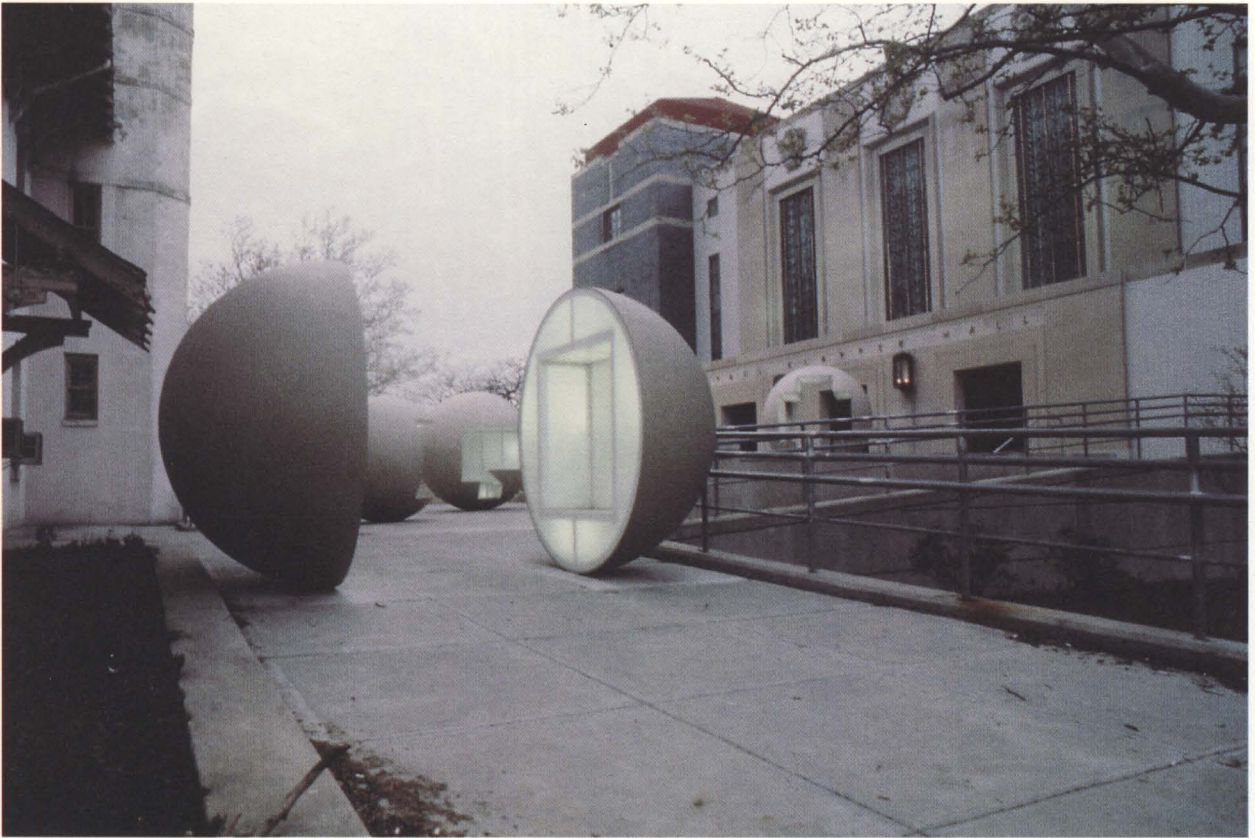
On the ramp up to the plaza, each half of a seven-foot sphere borders the pathway; you enter the plaza by crossing through a sphere — you can sit on either side, in a niche inside the cut. Within the plaza, a niche is cut half-way around an eight-foot two-inch sphere, where you can sit together with a group of people, side-by-side. Near the building across from the English department, a cut is made into either side of a four-foot eight-inch sphere, where you can sit behind another person, back-to-back. In the middle of the plaza, a niche is cut through the largest sphere, ten feet six inches, making an L-shaped seat around a table. Near the stairs, a cut is made in a two-foot four-inch sphere, forming a small back for a single seat. On the stairs, a five-foot ten-inch sphere is cut in half; you can walk through a three-foot space in the middle. On the landing at the top of the stairs, a cross-shaped niche is cut into a nine-foot four-inch sphere, through which you can walk between two rows of seated people. Against the building, next to the door, the top is cut off the smallest sphere, one foot two inches, so that you can sit on it.

The plaza is filled with itself, filled with the elements that were there all the time, the spheres on either side of the stairs. the spheres have replicated; the plaza turns on itself, like the attack of the killer tomatoes. Now that the plaza is occupied by things and places, it can be occupied in turn by people. You sit within the glow of the spheres.









## HOUSE UP A BUILDING

1996

Aluminum, grating, rubber, corrugated fiberglass panels, camping equipment, fluorescent lights

Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela

Variable height x 30 x 7'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Jenny Schridder, Charles Doherty]

**PROGRAM:** A portable housing complex adaptable to the blank wall of any building.

**ORIGINAL SITE:** Alvaro Siza's museum building, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela, Spain.

**PROJECT:** 9 pairs of telescoping tubes, U-shaped at one end and L-shaped at the other. The U-shaped ends hook onto the parapet of the building; from the L-shaped ends hangs one module of a housing complex.

Each house-module holds a corrugated metal roof and a floor of metal grating. Threaded rod extends from the end of the roof to the edge of the floor; attached to the metal rod is the furniture for each module. Each roof overlaps the next, and extends out over the furniture and floor below, to provide shade and shelter from rain; a line of cable connecting the threaded rod provides a railing.

Each unit is hung one step higher than the one before; as you walk up the side of the building, you walk from room to room of the house; as you walk up the house, you walk from public room to private rooms: from a seat, to a table and bench, to a stove, to a refrigerator, to a sink, to a shower, to a toilet, to a bed.

Rain is collected on the roof, so that water is provided for the sink and the shower.

In the original installation, the HOUSE provided, on the outside wall of the museum, a shelter for people who might not want to go inside the museum.

The HOUSE can be hung with its companion-unit, PARK UP A BUILDING, on different walls of a building, as at Santiago; or the HOUSE can be hung alone.



















## PARK UP A BUILDING

1996

Aluminum, grating, trees and tree-bags, fluorescent lights

Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela

Variable height x 36 x 7'

Vito Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Jenny Schrider, Charles Doherty]

PROGRAM: A portable park adaptable to a blank wall of any building.

ORIGINAL SITE: Alvaro Siza's museum building, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela, Spain.

### PROJECT:

9 pairs of telescoping tubes, U-shaped at one end and L-shaped at the other. The U-shaped ends hook onto the parapet of the building; from the L-shaped ends, one module of a park is suspended on threaded rod.

2 types of park-module alternate: a floor with a seat on opposite sides, inside and outside; and a floor with a seat on the inside and a tree on the outside. A connector, a step, joins one module to another. The floor, the seat and the step are metal grating — you can look up through them; the tree is enclosed within a metal grate, its roots encased in burlap sack it was transported in. A light from beneath each floor illuminates the park. Each successive module is hung one step higher than the one before: as you walk through the park — as you walk from step to floor, between seat and seat and between seat and tree — you're climbing up the side of the building.

The tubes, the park-hangers, telescope down to 8-foot sections, so that they can be transported and adjusted to buildings of different heights. The PARK can be hung with its companion-unit, HOUSE UP A BUILDING, on different walls; or the PARK can be hung alone.











## PARK IN THE WATER

1993–1997

Concrete, water, trees, lamp-posts, gravel

Laakhaven/Hollands Spoor, The Hague

16 x 74 x 80'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Jenny Schrider, Charles Doherty]

**SITE:** Off a footpath, behind a complex of university buildings, a triangular body of land projects out into a U-shaped water channel. Set into the land is a triangle of trees, evenly spaced and densely packed together, all cut to the same height; here and there, the place of a tree is taken by a lamp-post.

**PROJECT:** One quarter of the triangle of land is pivoted out, from its tip, into the water channel; the displaced land rises and falls, like a glacier, in an out of the water, while water seeps into the land, in-between trees.

The land is cut through two lines of trees, perpendicular to each other: a tree is left on one side of the cut, in a circle of ground that protrudes over the water, while the negative of the circle is notched into the other side — the notch is terraced down into the water, leaving the inverse of steps under the protruding circle. Here and there the cut results in two negatives, one half-circle cut out of the pivoted triangle and one half-circle cut out of the mainland; a tree is let loose, a lamp-post is let loose, into the water like an island.

The water cuts out a haven in the middle of trees; you can step down into the water, and sit on the terraced benches in the water; you can cross the water, and step out onto an island. In the middle of the public space in front of the university, there are intimate spaces within the trees, and within the water.





## WALKWAYS TROUGH THE WALL, WISCONSIN AVENUE CONCOURSE

1996–1998

Colored concrete, standard gray concrete, steel, light-box floor

Midwest Convention Center, Milwaukee

14 1/2 x 68 x 204'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, David Leven, Celia Imrey, Luis Vera, Jenny Schrider, Saija Singer]

**SITE:** Outside the wall of the Convention Center, the sidewalk is a standard gray non-colored concrete; the sidewalk is spotted with planters, halfway across its width and near the curb. Inside the wall, the concourse floor is colored concrete; the concourse is a balcony that hovers over the basement, where palm-trees grow up through the atrium.

**PROJECT:** The ground slips out from under you: inside and outside, the ground swerves off-course and squeezes through, under the wall, to the other side. As the ground swerves away, it's replaced by light, that lights the ground you walk on.

Inside the Convention Center, strips of pavement split off from the floor and curve away toward the inside wall; they squeeze under the wall, under the windows, and slip outside — they continue outside the wall, inserting swathes of interior floor within the sidewalk. Curving across the sidewalk, and cutting through the planters, the swathes of floor curl up at their ends, at different points along the width of the sidewalk, to form seats; some swathes curl back and form seats facing in, toward the wall, while one swathe curls up and folds over, forming a roof above a seat that faces out to the street...

Outside the Convention Center, strips of sidewalk split off from the ground and curve away toward the outside wall; they squeeze under the wall, under the windows, and slip inside — they continue inside the wall, inserting swathes of sidewalk within the pavement inside. Curving across the interior concourse, the swathes of sidewalk jump the rail of the balcony and form seats off the edge; a swath of sidewalk pushes out the railing and curls up to the form, in mid-air, over the basement below, a seat facing in toward the concourse — a swathe of sidewalk slips under the railing and droops down to the basement, where it curls up onto an indoor planter to form a seat facing in toward the basement.

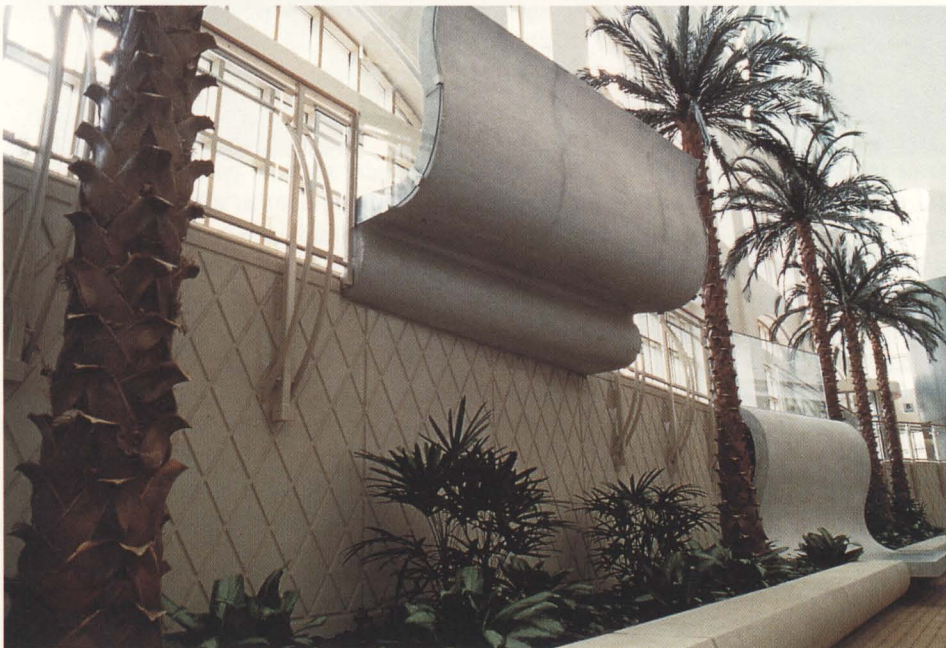
The swathes of sidewalk and floor are tied up in knots: they cross over and under each other, as they cross through the wall. The Convention-Center Concourse inside the wall, and the sidewalk outside, blend into a continuous plaza; it's as if the wall has vanished into thin air — it's as if you can walk through the wall.











PROJECT FOR MARIENHOF, MUNICH ("CIRCLES IN THE SQUARE")

1998

Steel tubing, light, grating, fabric, mirror, glass, polycarbonate, mesh, concrete, asphalt, trees, water.

295 x 393 x 492'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Darío Núñez, Sergio Prego, Rafael Varela, Thomas King, Suchitra Van]

**SITE:** An "accidental" plaza, that exists as a consequence of bombings during the Second World War; the surrounding buildings here, instead of functioning as the walls of an outdoor room, just happen to be there on the edge. Below the plaza is a subway station.

**PROGRAM:** Make a structure for activities in the plaza, and give reasons for people to be there.

**PROJECT:** The pavement of the square is a large circle, the left-over space is covered with grating and lit from below. You enter the square, you enter the circle within the square, by walking over a void of light.

A complex of spheres sits on the circles: the spheres are open tubular structures, in three sizes, bunched together and interlocked. One sphere intersects another; a sphere above is cradled by spheres below; the lowest spheres settle underground and bulge up above the ground.

In the center of the complex, and interspersed throughout, are Garden Spheres. Around each tree-filled sphere is a ramp, made of grating; the edge of the ramp folds into a bench — you sit with foliage. From the spiraling walkways around the Garden-Spheres, you access other spheres, other globes, other worlds. The Garden-Spheres are free spaces that lead to programmed spaces.

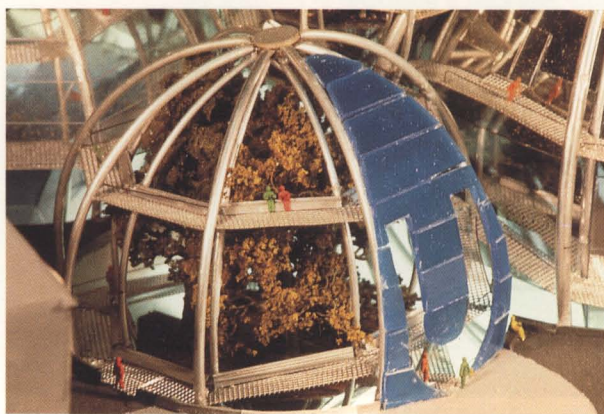
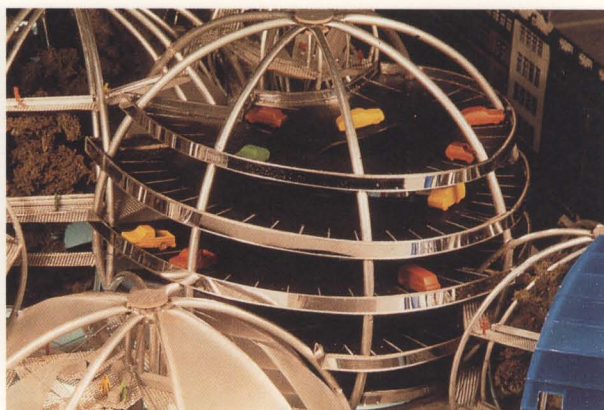
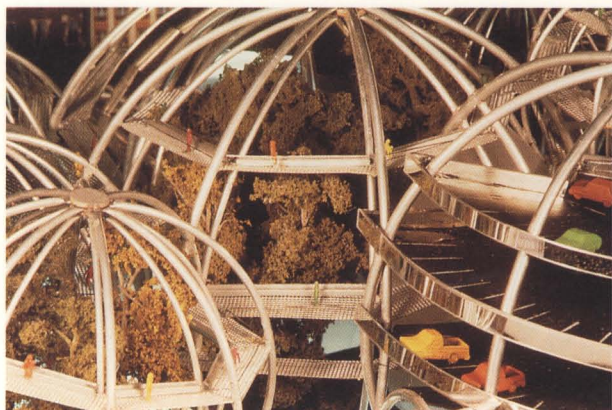
Two Subway-Spheres (through an open "U" cut out of a blue triangular section, you take an escalator, in-between trees and soil, down into the subway station below the plaza); a Parking-Sphere; a Market-Sphere; a Theater-Sphere; an Aviary-Sphere (you walk around birds, below birds, above birds); a Skate-Sphere (the skateboarders appear as ghosts behind translucent fiberglass skating ramps, like slices out of an orange); a Pool-Sphere (the pyramid of the swimming pool extends down into the subway station below: in the station, there's an aquarium of human beings overhead).

Where two spheres interlock, the shared space is closed up with frosted glass. These shared spaces are Service-Spheres (different floors function as toilets, and snack-bars, and storage, and maintenance closets, and backstage areas, and dressing-rooms).

This new plaza, dense with spheres, is a city within the city. The spheres rise like bubbles amid the surrounding buildings.







ARCHITECTURE V  
STAGE-SETS & EXHIBITION DESIGN: RENOVATIONS

## THEATER PROJECT FOR A ROCK BAND

1995

Fabric walls and ceilings, motors, lights, wood, narrative voice on audiotape, live band

BAM, at the Dia Center for the Arts, New York

12 x 44 x 44'; 45-minute performance

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Jenny Schridder, Charles Doherty] and the Mekons [Jon Langford, Tom Greenhalgh, Sally Timms, Rico Bell, Sarah Corina, Steve Goulding]

The theater is a hexagon that can be installed in a space of any size and any shape. The performance is the making of an architecture, and the making of a song, and the making of a band.

The hexagon is divided into six trapezoids of audience seating, facing the center; each trapezoid is surrounded, at the sides and at the front, by three-foot high walls; suspended above each audience-sector is a trapezoidal ceiling, twelve feet high.

In the center of the hexagon is a smaller hexagon, a wood "stage" with a triangular opening in the middle, inside which sit three technicians, one for sound and one for light and one for motorized movement.

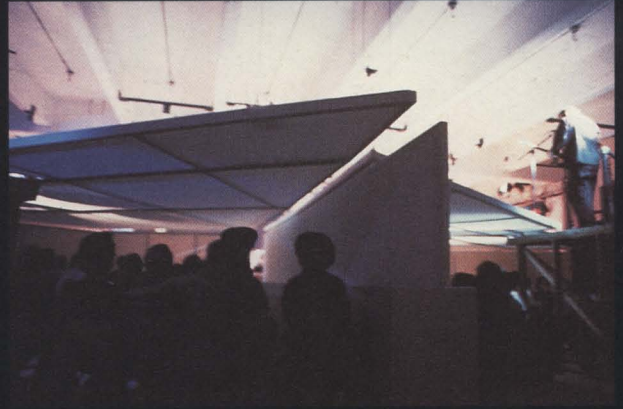
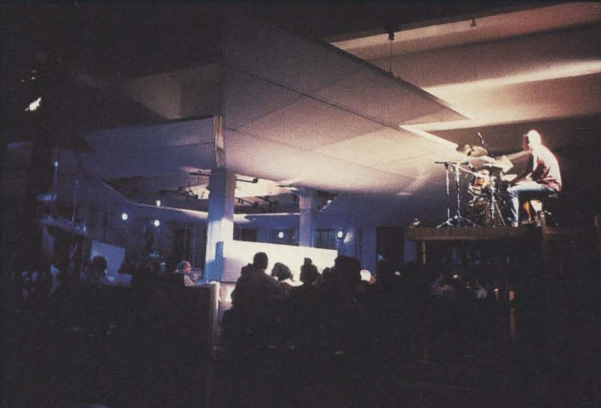
At the rear of each trapezoid is a wood scaffolding that holds a triangular platform six feet high; on each platform is one member of the six-member band, a "personal performer" for each sector of the audience.

The walls and ceiling "perform": from the low wall at three sides of each audience sector, another wall might rise, doubling the height — above each sector, the ceiling might descend to a height of six feet. There are different combinations of movement: the stage might be walled off from the audience — each audience sector might be walled in, and shut out from the others — the performers might be together, above the ceiling, while the audience is left alone below.

While the architecture moves in space, the performers move toward each other in time. The performance consists of forty-five one-minute segments, a minute of the Mekons' 100% SONG, divide into six sections. Each section begins in darkness, with a narrator's voice: the narrator loses his voice — he wishes the band was meeting as if for the very first time — he realizes other people ("you") were there all the time — he gathers together with "us" to make a world — he can't go home again, and gets lost in the crowd — he invites everyone to the dance. As the narrator stops speaking, the lights go on and the band performs. First, each band-member performs one minute of the song alone; then two band-members perform together, then three together, then four, then five; finally, all the band-members perform together, forming a band.

The rise and fall of the architecture isolates band-members, or joins them in different couplings and groupings. In each segment, a cold white spotlight from behind floods each performing band-member; the spotlight throws a shadow onto the ceiling of the wall; the band-members who aren't performing are bathed in colored light, they're out of the spotlight. At the end, spotlights flood all the band-members in glaring light; shadows loom light giants over the audience.





SUPPORT-STRUCTURE FOR MODELS

1994

L'Usine, Le Consortium, Dijon

Outside the one window in the gallery, the roof of a neighboring building is visible.

The roof is reconstructed in the gallery. Sections of the roof are flipped up, and hinged out, to support models, drawings, texts, and photos.

There are models both outside the roof and inside. The structure holds thirty models.











WALLS OF GROUND (A DISPLAY-SYSTEM FOR LANDSCAPE MODELS)

1996

Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela

Steel pipe, brackets, fluorescent light tubes

26 x 180 x 3'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Jenny Schrider, Charles Doherty]

SITE: The lobby of the museum: the ceiling heights change, from 8 feet to 30 1/2 feet to 33 feet-walls skew off from wall.

PROJECT: A display-system for landscape models: a display-system for models that might be seen best from above, in plan-view.

A line of steel pipe starts on a low ceiling, bends onto a wall, and continues to rise and fall from wall to wall. The pipe bends out of line, on the wall, to hold a model; the pipe functions as a frame — the model is screwed to the frame. The pipe bends, out from the wall, in order to hold a fluorescent light tube, directed toward the model and illuminating the model. The pipe functions as conduit: cord from the fluorescent lights, and electrical cord from the models that have their own light, is passed through the pipe.

The walls function as floors: you look at each model, whether it's on a wall or on a ceiling, from above the model. The walls function as billboards: while print, in smaller type, continues the line of one edge of the model, print in larger type cuts in between models and intersects pipe. This larger type functions as floating signifiers adrift in the field of white walls. Categories float as if at sea, categories shoot in all directions as if exploded: LAYERS OF LANDSCAPE - SIGNS OF LAND - WHY BUILDINGS FALL DOWN - EARTH QUAKES - LAND SLIDES

triangle

Park behind a mental hospital

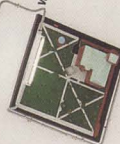
# EARTH QUAKES



Civil rights memorial in a park



Bus shelter & outdoor classroom



War memorial on a courthouse lawn



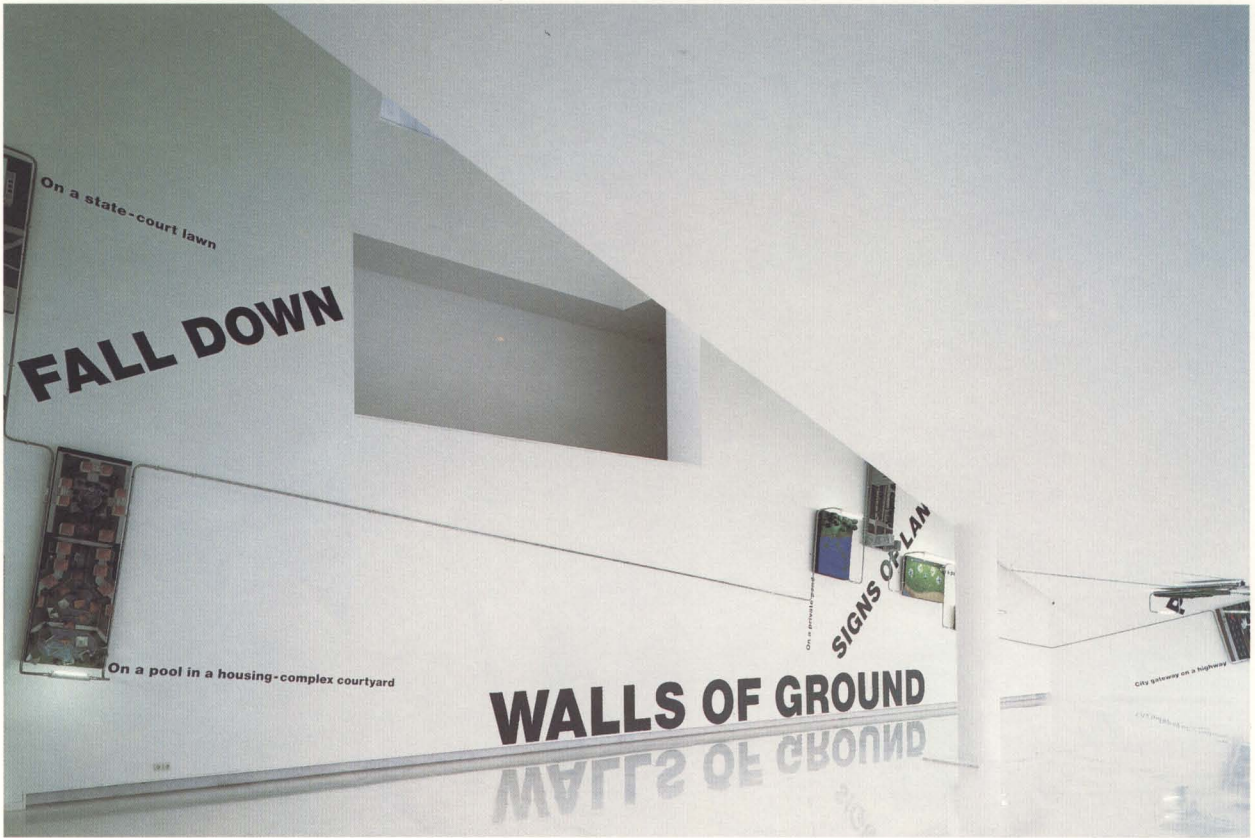
WALLS FALL DOWN

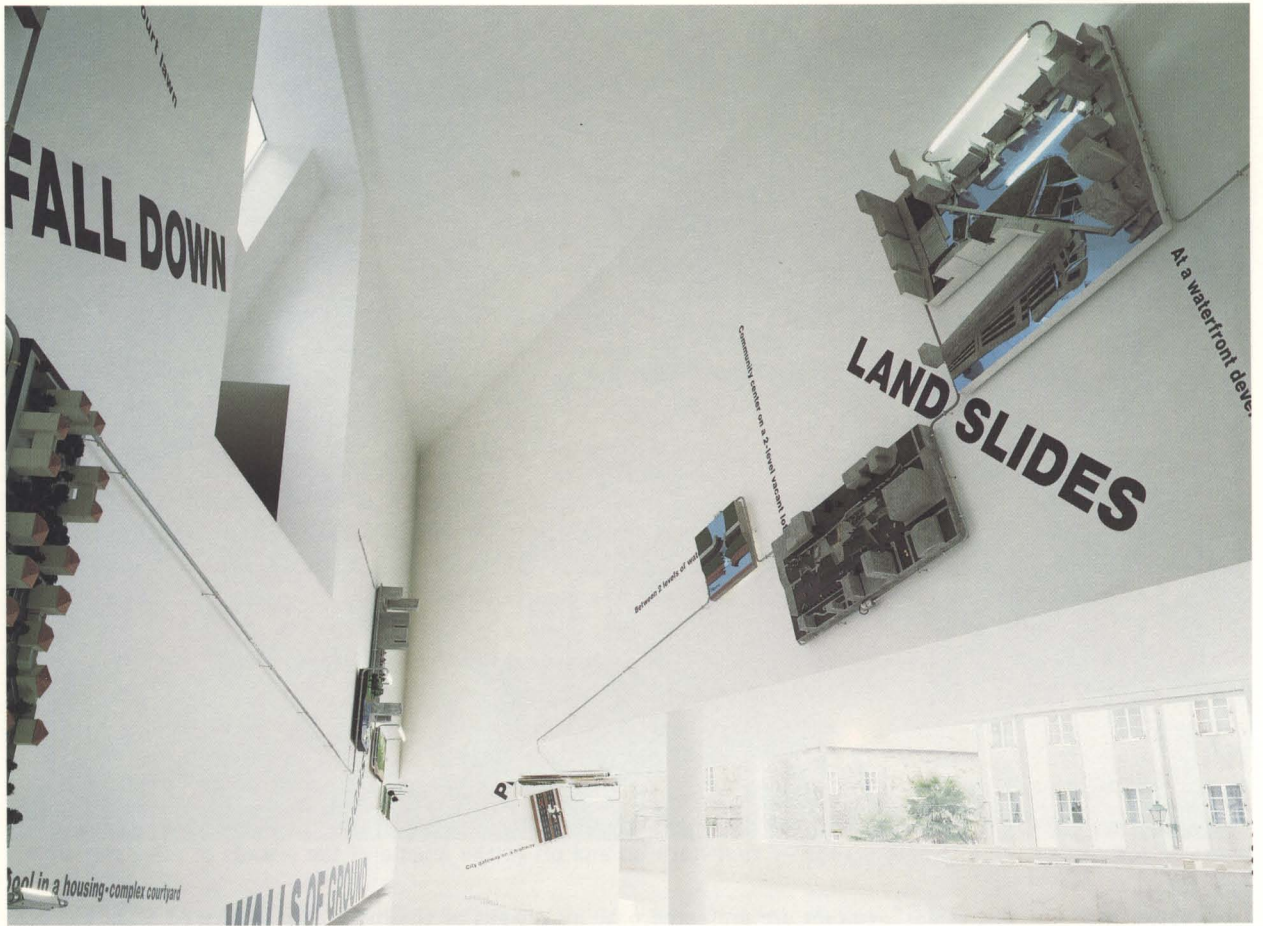


On wall in a meeting room

# WALLS







UNDER THE TABLE [SLIDES/FILMS/VIDEO OF THE EARLY 70's]

1996

Wood, video monitors and videotapes, video and slide projections, strobe-lights, spotlight

Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela

9 1/2 x 36 x 64'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Jenny Schrider, Charles Doherty]

**SITE:** A room with a dropped ceiling, an "inverted table", hanging under the skylight. The "inverted table" directs natural light onto the walls, and holds artificial light for the illumination of the room.

**PROJECT:** The "inverted table" engenders a set of smaller tables, similarly inverted, that come down at various heights from ceiling to floor; above the "inverted table", the room illumination is replaced by projector light.

The smaller inverted tables — upside-down table-tops hung from table-legs — support video monitors. The videotapes focus on my body; the size of each monitor approximates the side of the part of my body on the screen; the height of each inverted table, and the monitor on top of it, approximates the position of my body on screen. If the video image is a close up on my face, the monitor is a head-size, 13 inches, and sits on a table surface 5 feet high; if, on a videotape, I'm sitting down, the monitor fits the size of my torso, 20 inches, and is placed at conventional table height, 30 inches off the floor; if, on a videotape, I'm lying on the floor, the monitor sits on a table-surface 9 inches high. The small inverted tables range in size from 3 feet square to 12 feet long; the long tables support 2 facing monitors (for 2 videotapes face-to-face), a chair facing a monitor (for a videotape where I'm sitting at the head of a table, facing a viewer at the other end), a spotlit stool facing a monitor (for a videotape where I'm lying down, talking to a viewer on a stool above me.)

5 "inverted tables" are higher than the other, 8 feet 6 inches off the ground. These higher tables support strobe-lights — red, yellow, blue, green, orange — that flash on and off in the middle of the islands of television light.

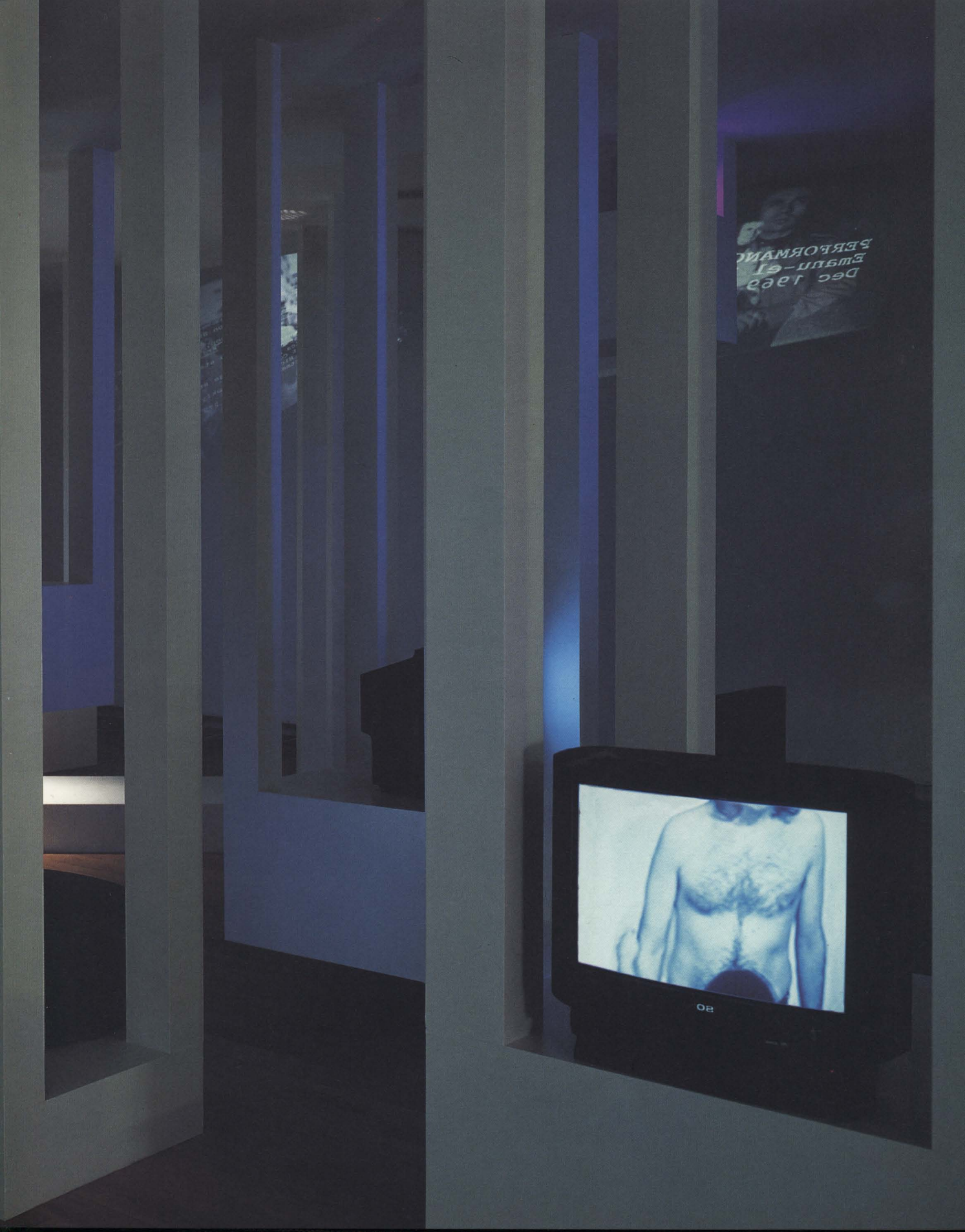
From above the "inverted tables", images are projected onto all 4 walls of the room, like wallpaper. Slide projectors project slides of performances and activities; video projectors project pieces shot as film. Whereas the video monitors, on the inverted tables, show my body in close-up, the projections on the wall show my body in the landscape, or my body seen as a landscape.











## TELE-FURNI-SYSTEM

1997

Steel pipe and angle, video monitors, miniature speakers, industrial carpet 16 x 20 x 23' (variable)

Rooms with a view, Guggenheim Museum Soho, New York

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Celia Imrey, Dario Núñez, Saija Singer]

**SITE:** A conventional museum room, that functions as the entry-room to an exhibition of video-viewing situations.

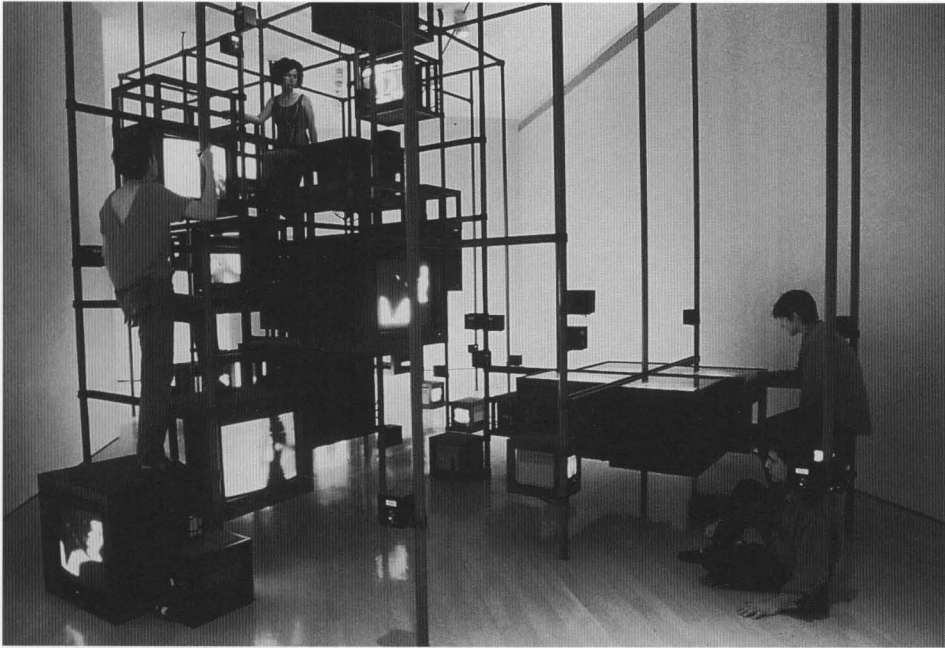
**PROGRAM:** An environment for watching videotapes.

**PROJECT:** A system of architecture and furniture, for viewing videotapes, that is made up of the video monitors that are being viewed.

Each monitor is encased in a steel framework inserted into a four-foot grid of steel pipe, from floor to ceiling. The monitors are spread through the room at different heights and in different directions. The monitors are stepped on, sat on, reclined on, in order to look at other monitors; the monitors used as architecture and furniture are, in turn viewed from other monitors — the monitors viewed are, in turn, architecture and furniture for viewing other monitors.

The monitors make up seats, stairways, beds and tables; the stepping-and-seating surface of each monitor is covered by a pad of industrial carpet. Audio-speakers are attached to the pipes, at the height appropriate for each viewing position.

The system is adaptable to any room, and infinitely expandable: anywhere there's a monitor that can be looked at and listened to, it needs another monitor as architecture/furniture from which you can look and listen — anywhere a monitor can be used as architecture or furniture, it calls for another monitor you can look at and listen to.





## HEAD THEATERS

1997

Video monitors, wood, steel, cable, bicycle seats

Stroom, The Hague

5 x 8 x 12 1/2'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Celia Imrey, Darío Núñez, Saija Singer]

**SITE:** A gallery room studded with columns: an exhibition of Acconci's videotapes from the early 70's.

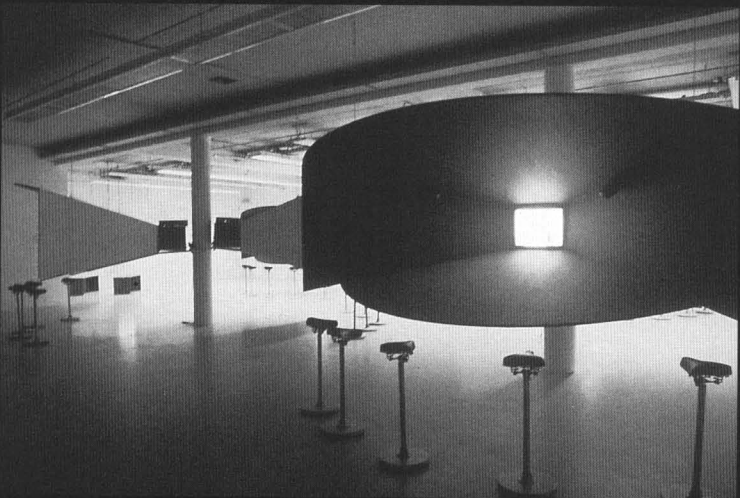
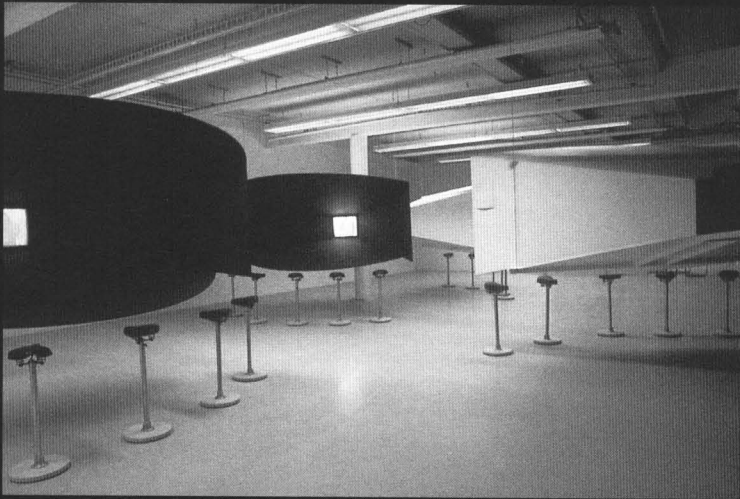
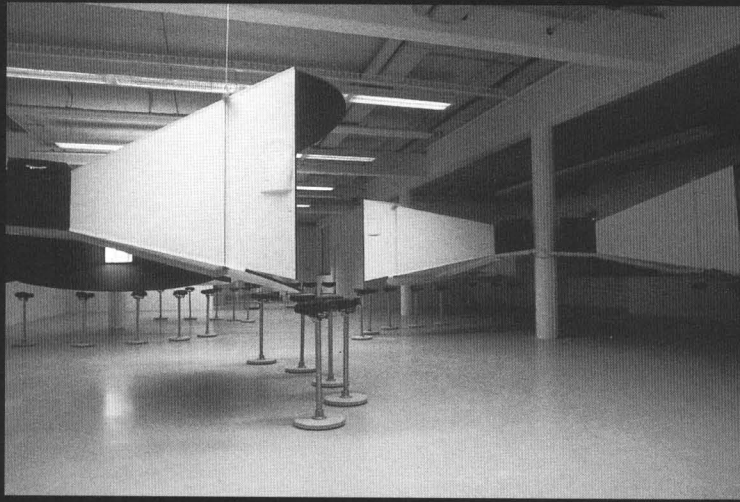
**PROGRAM:** The showing of a number of videotapes in the same room and at the same time.

**PROJECT:** A set of "video capsules", "video theaters", each for a small group of people watching a videotape.

Each capsule is a "hood" that extends from the front of a video monitor; it resembles a megaphone, or the bellows of a camera. The hood is attached to a column, and hung from the ceiling, at table-height; bicycle seats, propped on posts, curve around the open front of the hood; you enter onto the seats from behind, as if you're riding into the world of video.

The ceiling of the hood laps over the seats; the side walls stretch past the seat on each end. Whereas the exterior walls are part of the gallery — they're painted white — the interior is black (it's as if the lights go out and the film begins). The hood makes a little theater for a small group of viewers, a little theater in the middle of other theaters, in the middle of any space; you lean into the capsule, and you're isolated within the image and sound of a videotape.

The project is adaptable to any space. The version at STROOM should be considered a prototype: the "hoods" there were made of wood, whereas a more permanent version should be made of steel, or aluminum (they should be like machines, or space-ships) — at Stroom the bicycle seats were supported from the floor, whereas in a more finished version they should hang from the hood (the theater should include its seats within itself).





## INSIDE-OUT BOOKSTORE FOR DOCUMENTA X

1997

Acrylic panels, wood, steel, fluorescent light-tubes, video monitors and keyboards

Walter König's Bookstore, Documentahalle, Kassel

20 x 28 x 48'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Celia Imrey, Darío Núñez, Saija Singer, Luis Vera]

**SITE:** Between two entrances to the lecture hall. One doorway, on the ground floor of one side of the building, opens to a stairway that leads down into the hall; the other doorway, on the ground floor of the other side, is downstairs, and leads in from the cafeteria.

**PROGRAM:** A bookstore for two kinds of books, art books and academic books. The bookstore should function, peripherally, as an information room for the lecture series.

**PROJECT:** A transparent bookstore. Outside the bookstore, you're on the wrong side of books. Entering the bookstore is like going inside the books, from behind.

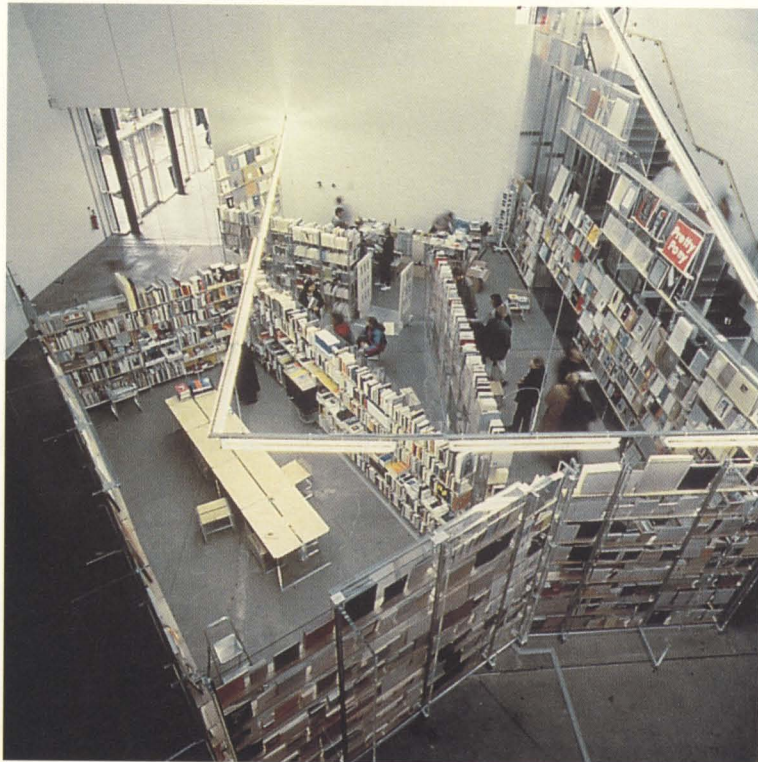
The walls, and the structure of the walls, are clear acrylic, behind which the wood shelves are floating on air.

The bookstore is formed by a wall of art books descending the stairway, and turning around and jogging back to the cafeteria doorway. As you walk around the outside of the bookstore, you see only the back-covers of books

The bookstore is opened from within: a block of academic books hinges apart and, in so doing, folds in a wall of art books. Suspended above the walls, a frame of fluorescent lights outlines the bookstore that might have been, were it not wedged open.

You make your way to entrance of the bookstore through a wedge of academic books; you see only the edges of book-pages. Between books, screens of video monitors show through the transparent walls; still outside the store, where you can't read the books, you can watch videotapes of past future lectures.

When you enter the bookstore, you come around the right side of books: the front covers of art books, the spines and titles of academic books. The furniture — a cashier's counter at one end, a reading table between bookshelves, chairs for the table and counter inside and for the videotapes outside — is made of the same wood as the bookshelves; the chair-backs are clear acrylic, like the walls. It's as if you're sitting on a bookshelf, like a book.



## STOREFRONT RENOVATION (WALL MACHINE)

1993

Supra-board, plaster, steel, hinges, light

Storefront For Art And Architecture, New York

9 x 100 x 14'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera] in collaboration with Steven Holl

**SITE:** A narrow triangular space that serves as an alternative gallery for architecture and art.

**PROGRAM:** An artist/architect collaboration that results in a new facade for the gallery.

**PROJECT:** An adjustable and variable facade, a usable wall.

The wall is white-painted plaster inside, and supra-board (a concrete-like panel) outside.

The wall is divided into segments. Vertical seams separate the wall into panels that pivot, like revolving doors, side to side; the pivoting wall-panels can be fixed at various points, at different angles to the fixed wall — a wall-panel can be turned inside-out. Horizontal seams separate the wall into panels that pivot like louvers, up and down; the higher panels function as windows, transoms, open at different degrees — the lower panels can be turned and fixed at right angles to the fixed wall, so that they function as tables and benches.

When all the panels are rotated, and turned on an angle, there's continuity between inside and outside: the gallery becomes part of the street, and the street becomes part of the sidewalk — the wall is an instrument to be used (turned and sat on and stepped through) in the middle of a continuous space, with no inside or outside.

When all the panels are pulled shut, flush with the fixed wall, light from the inside seeps outside, through the seams, and vice versa. The closed panels might all be supra-board, so that the gallery presents itself shut off, like a fortress; the closed panels might all be white plaster, so that the gallery is turned inside-out; or the panels might be a mix of gray supra-board and white plaster, a patchwork of inside and outside on a single surface.

The facade is designed so that it can be adjusted variously for different exhibitions, according to the particular needs of each exhibition.









TEMPORARY RE-RENOVATION OF THE RENOVATED MAK CENTRAL EXHIBITION HALL

1993

Plaster, glass, concrete, steel, grass, tree

Österreichisches Museum Für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna

30 x 64 x 84'

Acconci Studio [Vito Acconci, Luis Vera, Jenny Schrider]

**SITE:** The central exhibition hall of a museum, a 19th century building recently renovated. The room is dominated by a central skylight. Side doorways lead to a U-shaped corridor that surrounds the room.

**PROGRAM:** A five-month installation.

**PROPOSAL:** The room is replicated; the room falls in on itself — the replicated room tilts down from one corner of the original room, the replicated room bulges out of the original room. As you enter, you're sandwiched between the skylight of the falling room and the skylight of another replicated room, a rising room. When you walk out the side door, and around the U-shaped corridor, you can enter onto the top of the falling room you once were inside of. The slanted floor, on top of the ceiling, is grass; now that the museum has fallen, it's been turned into landscape. You walk around a replicated wall from the upper story, and up onto the skylight of the falling room. You're sandwiched now between the replicated skylight and the original skylight. Wedged through the falling skylight is a corner of the rising skylight that you saw, or walked on, when you first entered the central exhibition hall; a tree, growing out of the rising skylight, comes up through the falling skylight — the tips of its branches reach up through removed panes of the original skylight.





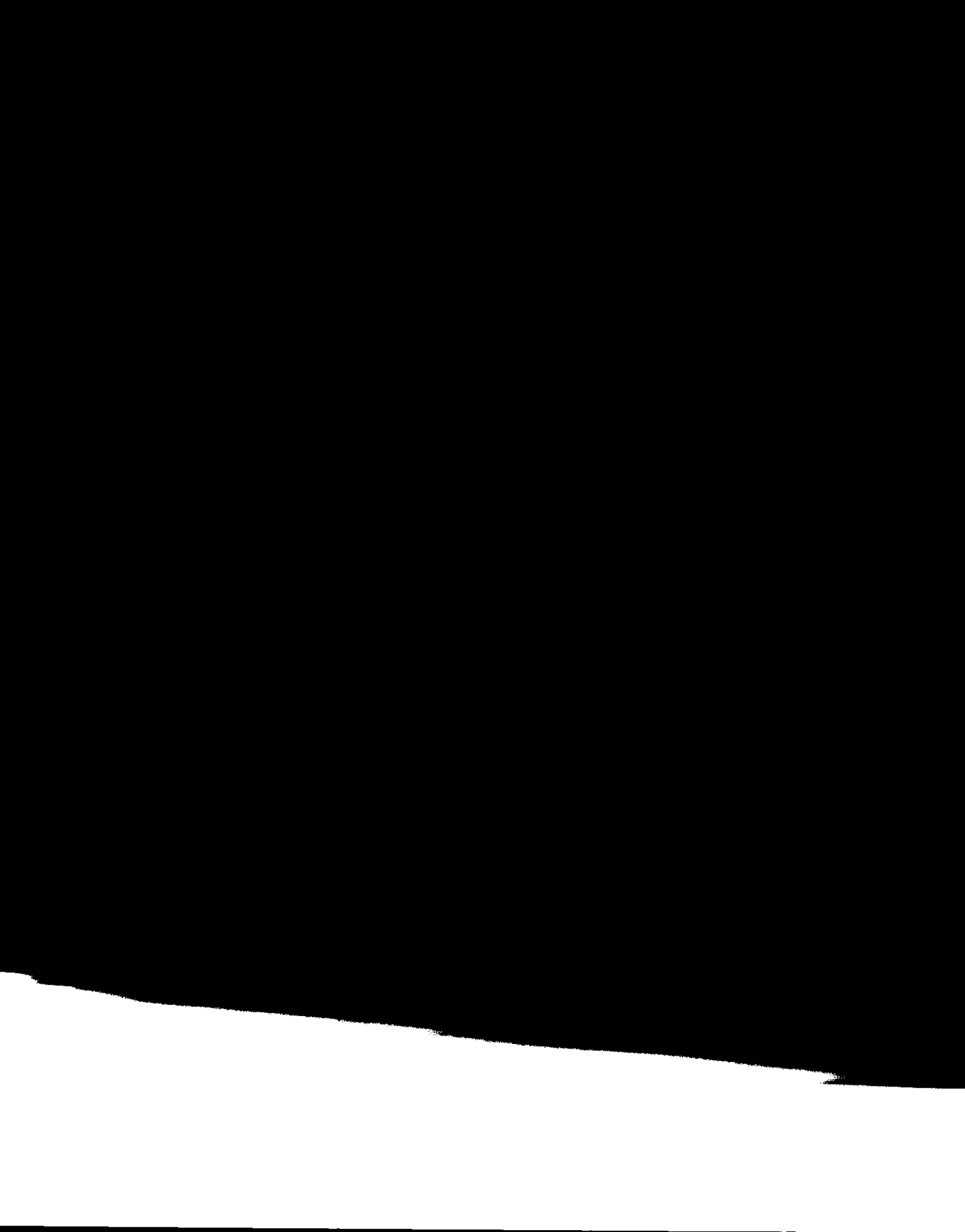












THEORETICAL WRITINGS



*NOTES ON MY PHOTOGRAPHS 1969–1970, January 1988*

My work had been poetry: the aim was to confine words to a page, to use that page as a container for words — inside that container, that trap, the words could move up against a barrier (the margin) and be beaten back into their cell (the page). [...] My first pieces, in an art context, were ways to get myself off the page and into real space. These photographic pieces were ways to, literally, throw myself into my environment. They were photos not of an activity but through an activity; the activity (once I planted a camera in the instrument of that activity — once I, simply, held a camera in my hands) could produce a picture.

[...]

The last pieces I did, in a poetry context, were “poetry events”: the occasion was a poetry reading — I used props (and audio recorder, the walls of the room or the chairs in that room) — the attempt was not to read from a page but to read the room. The first pieces I did, in an art context, were activities in the street, activities that only I knew I was performing; some of these were keyed into a performance situation — all of them could be documented later, and hence made public. Once they were documented, either through words or photographs, they could be shown on the walls of a gallery or museum; but the documents were only souvenirs, after the fact, whose proper place was in the pages of a book or magazine. These photographic pieces, on the other hand, were first-hand information: their only existence was as photographs — the activity of a photograph wasn’t an end in itself, the activity was performed only to cause a photograph. I wonder if, in the back of my mind, there wasn’t the urge to prove myself as an artist, prove myself a serious artist, make my place in the art-world: in order to do this, I had to make a picture, since a picture was what a gallery and museum was meant to hold (all the while, of course, I was claiming

that my work couldn’t, shouldn’t, have the finished quality of a photograph, my work was an event and a process that couldn’t, shouldn’t, be stilled by a camera and hung up on a gallery wall — all the while I was claiming that my work was meant to subvert the enclosure of museum and gallery). These photographic pieces, then, might have been the first steps in taming, domesticating, an agent whose method should have been that of a wanderer.

[...]

It was as if there was so much activity so that the body could be exhausted, so that the body no longer existed, so that the body drifted out of the body and into the environment. So maybe this wasn’t exhaustion at all: rather, the body exited only as it blended into the environment — the body was growing up, out of privacy and becoming public.

After these pieces, that sent me out into my environment, I chose to go back into my “self”. The next pieces set up occasions in which I could concentrate on myself — I brought stress from an outside world into my person, so that that person could change and develop. The shift of focus from outside to inside, reveals that I was afraid of being lost in space, lost out in the world, I had to come back home, I had to — in the language of that time, the language of the 60’s — “find myself”. But of course the career of my work might have been different: I might have chosen to look more closely at the world outside me, I might have chosen to travel further through it — I could have looked at that world as a field for behavior, rather than at myself as an instrument of behavior. It turned out that, years later — now, in 1988 — I am concentrating on the environment as a place for activity, other people’s activity rather than my own; whereas the early photographs put me into the street and the park, my recent pieces make a place in the street (a town square



NOTES ON WORK 1967–1970, 1980

for public meeting), my recent pieces make a park (an enclave in the middle of a city that functions as the model of an alternative world, a utopia). I arrived at those places through a process of exercising “me”, a process of expanding an “I”: first “I” with “me”, then “I” with “him” or “her”, then “I” with “you”, then a place where my voice can speak to “them”, then a place where my voice might bring “you” together, then a place that “you” could make, and now a place where “we” might be. The early photographs suggest that I might have side-stepped this process, taken a short-cut directly into the street and the park. But then those places might have remained stilled, as if a photograph; or they might have been distant places, as if in a movie, places held up in front of the eye, places that could be only desired.

Maybe I had to stop photographing so that I could learn to touch.

From the catalogue *Vito Acconci. A Retrospective: 1969 to 1980*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1980.

1

Notes on poetry: Words as props for movement (how to travel from left margin to right/how to make it necessary, or not necessary, to turn from one page to the next — Page as thing (the use of idioms, like “from the horse’s mouth”, that draw attention to themselves as language: the material exists only as it’s spoken, the words circle back on themselves and remain confined to the page) — Page as container (rather than have the page refer to outside space, something from that outside space can be installed on the page) — Page as a map (make reading time equivalent to the time required to perform an activity in outside space).

2

If I was using the page as a field for movement, there was no reason to limit that movement, there was no reason not to use a larger field (rather than move my hand over a page, I might as well be moving my body outside). In 1968, then, I was in this position: all my life I was accustomed to think to the page as my ground — now my ground had slipped out from under me (now I had forced my ground to slip out from under me).

3

My body as a system of possible movements transmitted by my body to the environment (the environment as a system of possible movements transmitted from the environment to my body).

4

Performing an activity means adhering to terms: I can move, in real space, by trying myself into a system

*SOME NOTES ON ACTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE, 1970*

(another agent, a conventional situation) outside me. I become an agent (of my own activity) by becoming a receiver (of someone else's activity).

5

The intention of the agent can be to make unwitting moves, observable behavior unoriented to the assessment an observer might be making of it. Generating expression, and hence making information available, need not be an official end of the action but only a side-effect.

6

If art can be divided into "art-doing" and "art-experiencing", I was concentrating, at this point, on (my) art-doing — (someone else's) experiencing was assumed as something that would, as a matter of course, happen later.

7

But the action was done not as a private activity (there was no notation made of my interpretations, my feelings, my subjective experience) but as an exemplar, a model (there was the listing of facts. The action was done, from the beginning, so that it could be turned into reportage, into rumor: the action, that started from a word (diagram/sentence), was done, from the beginning, so that it could be turned into reportage, into rumor: the action, that started from a word (diagram/sentence), was done only to return to words.

1. Accessibility (availability) of person

If the artist is a performer, in action, his presence alone produces signs and marks. The information he provides necessarily concerns the source of information, himself, he cannot be solely about some absent object; the information pertains to the general relationship of the individual to what is transpiring. If the artist cannot be continuously on exhibit, he can preset a situation on which, because of everyday living, he is required to act, wherever he may be at the time. (There might be exhibited, for example, an object that the artist must sometime or other need, and therefore go to pick up or send for; the object exhibited is there in preparation for his use.) Generating expression — and hence making the information available — need not be an official end of the action but only a side-effect. The intention of the performer can be make unwitting moves, observable behavior unoriented to the assessment an observer might be making of it.

2. Adaptive lines of action

A performance can consist of performing (adhering to the terms of) a particular element (a rule, a space, a previous performance, another person.) The performer can balance between tactics — selecting an immediate action from his available repertoire — and strategy — choosing where he wishes to be at a future time. The performance can be set up as a learning process. When the performer makes a move, the consequences of his behavior can control his next move. The use of feedback can steady and bring into unison one stage of the performance, after which can come change as new material is imported and adapted to. The performer can work as a producer; the performance pattern can be linear — a series of additions of material and energy. Or he can work as a consumer; the patterns can be radical — lines of material and energy converging on him for his use.

### 3. Drift

If there is a lag in feedback, the direction of the performance can be changed. A line of action can be weakened by emergent forces in the surrounding field; the consequences of an action can become increasingly unpredictable.

The performance can begin with an alarm reaction to a stimulus, when the performer is groping because he has not yet specifically developed a system to cope with the task at hand. The performance can take up time as the performer goes through a stage of resistance and adaptation, developing a specific channel of defense. The performance can continue to a stage of exhaustion, when the specific channel of adaptation is broken down — the reaction spreading over different areas — and momentum is retained for a while after the shutoff of power.

The exhaustion is reversible if the performer can rest, as part of the performance — if he can “mark time”, as things come in and out of focus — or if he can pass without serious resistance to another pattern.

### 4. Deprivation, stigma, and invasion of privacy

In the stage of exhaustion, the performer is potentially vulnerable. A performance can provide an occasion for wearing out his channels of resistance and rules of order; it can shift into explicit focus what is ordinarily unattended to; it can produce a deprivation that calls for supernormal reactions in an attempt at stabilization.

How the performer acts, in a certain situation, can be revealed to be at variance with the category and attributes that are socially demanded of him. He can be reduced from a “whole” person to a “tainted” and discredited one.

The subject of a performance can be the control (or lack of control) of personal information. The performance can be a means of developing a handicap, or a stigma, that would make control more difficult.

### 5. Strategy and interaction

If the performer comes into contact with another party (another performer, or an observer), the situation can be one that the performer assesses while the other party is trying to penetrate that assessment; the other party can realize that the performer’s assessment includes, as one of its features, the fact that the other party will try to penetrate it.

When assessment is the basis of an activity, the performer can become a parasite on the other party, or he can absorb him. (A performance can use, for example, techniques of spying, following, imitating; an exhibit can propose that some personal possessions of the artist, such as his clothes, can be borrowed and used for the duration of the exhibition.)

A performance can be a series of conditional avowals, where the performer will pursue a given course of action if the other party engages (or does not engage) in another course of action. What can be at stake in a performance is not a location (and its occupation) but the capacity to move more or less at will.

1

We hated the word "performance"; we couldn't, call what we did "performance". Because "performance" didn't appear in the middle of nowhere; "performance" had a place, and that place by tradition was a theater, and that theater was a target, a point you went toward and an enclosure you immersed yourself in. But we didn't want you to come to us and be in our "world", a world that "we" had formed, a transformation of the real world; we wanted, instead, a region that was a section of the accustomed world that everybody knows and that you simply as a matter of course passed by, that you chose sometimes of your own accord to go through. The problem with "point" and "enclosure" — whether it took the form of "museum" or it took the form of "theater" — was that it was a separate entity, set off from the world around it. This separation meant that only some people could be part of what was separated, only people who were already initiated into that specialized world-within-a-world, from which all the others were already left out; this separation meant, too, that what was separated off was automatically focused on, concentration was pre-determined, the point and enclosure were abstractions of the world and not the messy world itself.

2

The streets were ours. We took our cue from the song of a few years before: why don't we do it in the road?

3

The problem with doing work in the streets was: the work would fall into ready-made categories — either it was a "happening" or it as a "demonstration". But those words were yesterday's papers, those words came out of the 60's. Since the streets, then, were already encoded into another time, we had to get off the streets and go back home. We had to find a home, or

make a home for ourselves. We had two choices of housing: that home could have been the theater, or it could have been the gallery. We chose the gallery because we saw the gallery (we wanted to see the gallery) as an analogue of the street, a representation of the street; our model was the New York gallery, like 420 West Broadway, where — rather than having just one gallery as a destination — you walked from floor to floor, you meandered through five floors. The gallery, like the street, was not a node you stopped at but a circulation route that you passed through; going to galleries was like window-shopping.

4

Seeing the gallery as a street was a formalization, or a self-imposed blindness. The building-full-of-galleries should have been seen, more sharply, as the analogue or representation of the convention center or the shopping mall.

5

On the one hand, performance of the 70's was performance in the light: instead of a performance on stage and in the spotlight that broke the darkness, what we gave was a performance at high noon, when the light was everywhere and everything was light, a performance in the light of day that the performance itself couldn't escape, where the performance melted into its surroundings and became part of everyday life. On the other hand, performance of the 70's acted as if it hadn't always been in the light, it behaved as if it had been pulled (forcibly, grudgingly) into the light; for that to happen, the performance itself had to have originated in the dark, it had to come out of the dark, the performance (no matter how glaringly light its situation was) had to itself be deep and dark: the performance functioned as a dark disturbed night in the middle of the day, the performance worked like

dirty little secret — the performance was a place-in-itself, the bedroom wrenched out of the privacy of one's own home and exposed in the middle of the town-square.

6

Either the performance blended into the woodwork, so that it was hardly noticed; or the performance was so set apart from its surroundings that the performer could be called a criminal or a crazy. In either case, performance sought the light; it sought distribution, it sought credibility. The gallery, and the art magazines it supported, shed light on performance; performance shared the light of the gallery, bathed in the light of the gallery, performance became credible and done in the name of "art" as long as it appeared in the gallery. Light means distribution; light also is the glitter of gold; distribution comes with money, and so does art.

7

People did performance in order not to do painting and sculpture. Painting and sculpture had the power of the One True God of Art; performance was a way to intrude, in the middle of a single-belief system, the swarm of multiple gods. This purpose might have been equally served by any old alternative medium, but not quite; what performance did was more specific and more pointed, or maybe just more blunt — performance functioned not as an addition to other media but as a takeover, a replacement. Into the art space, into a world of objects and things, performance let the body loose, like a bull in a china shop: into a world of representation, performance introduced action — into a world of representation, performance introduced fact — into a world of mind, performance introduced flesh — into a world of universals, performance introduced the vulnerability of universals, performance introduced transience.

8

On the one hand, performance imposed the unsaleable onto the store that the gallery is. On the other hand, performance built that store up and confirmed the market-system: it increased the gallery's sales by acting as window-dressing and by providing publicity.

9

There was one way I loved to say the word "performance" — one meaning of the word "performance" that I was committed to: "performance" in the sense of performing a contract — you promised you would do something, now you have to carry that promise out, bring that promise through to completion. Performance was the literal embodiment of an idea; it was a way of denying mind/body separation; it was as if the performer were saying: look, I have this idea, but talk is cheap, so don't believe me, don't trust me — instead, step right up and touch me, my body is proving my idea by going through the motions. Performance was analogous to the situation of the stand-up comedian: the lights go on, you have to do something, the audience is waiting like hungry wolves, this is the point of no return, there's no turning back now.

10

I remember a scene from Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool*, a movie about the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, a movie about the Chicago Eight. The movie mixes fiction with documentary footage; at one point, during the filming of the riot, you can hear the voice of the camera-person off-screen: "Look out, Wexler", he's shouting, "this is real!". Performance of the 70's acted as if it was real; the guise was: this is happening just as it would be happening even if you the viewer didn't happen to be here — or, this is happening with you the viewer as part of it, as if



we've all been together for a long long time. But the belief couldn't hold up, the facts showed the theory for the wishful thinking it was: this "real" wasn't there before and continuing into this performance moment, this "real" was only just born for this purpose, this "real" was set up, this "real" was for performance's sake. Performance of the 70's was the establishment of crisis moments, an Alladin's lamp meant to rub the real into existence.

11

The last performance I ever did was a piece called Ballroom; it was done in Florence in 1973. The gallery was turned into a dance-hall: a circle of white tables and chairs around the "dance-floor", where three spotlights shone down from the ceiling. I was in the center of the circle: I'm walking, semi-dancing, from spot to spot on the floor — I'm looking down, I'm turned inward — it's more that I'm reflecting on something rather than exhibiting myself to an audience. In the background there's sound: on one channel of an audiotape my voice hums Al Jolson's *Anniversary Song* (I am changing tempos, my hum is absent-minded, I'm shifting styles and arrangements); on the other channel I'm talking to "you", a specific "you", someone involved in my life: "...I'm dancing with you, Nancy... But wait, now Kathy is cutting in... So I'm dancing with you, Kathy..." Every now and then, I step out of the spotlight, I break out of my closed circle and approach one of the tables: a flashlight shines on my face, I've picked out at random a person sitting at the table, I'm making a sexual advance, I'm begging, I'm helpless as a child: "...look, neither Nancy nor Kathy really understands me... but you'd understand me... you'd know what to do with me..." The piece was performed for three consecutive nights; the first two nights were without incident, the performance went smoothly, as the saying goes, as

lived up to its name "performance", it was just like acting, it was like putting on a show. But then there was the third night... On the third night, as I approached a table and entreated and tried to seduce, a woman got up and hugged me, she held me tight: I couldn't pretend this wasn't happening, this was something I couldn't just walk away from. Okay, I said, if you want to take Kathy or Nancy's place, then you have to do as they would have done, you have to be them, you have to take the bad times along with the good. So I got my arms loose somehow and hit her, I slapped her hard across the face. That didn't stop her, she held me closer. What's left, I say, what do we do now: all we can do is fuck, right here, right now. She gets down on the floor then, she's lying down on her back, her arms outstretched, she waits for me. But I can't go on, I can only go back. I walk back into the spotlight, return to my closed circle, close myself up in my audio dreams of Nancy and Kathy.

12

In retrospect, I could put it this way: I thought, probably without even thinking about it, that I knew my audience — these were Italians, their attitude would be one of rapt attention in front of "art", dead quiet as if at a church. But I hadn't counted on an American student, which is what that woman was; I hadn't accounted for the presence of the misfit, the Ugly American, the person who doesn't know their rules or who knowingly breaks them anyway, the *naïf*, the bull in the china shop... That bull in the china shop is what, earlier, I called performance art as a whole: this is how performance art functioned in relation to the art gallery and the art world. My use of the same metaphor to refer to both performance in general and to a person who reacted to a particular performance obliges me to connect action with theory. This specific instance, of an American woman re-

forming a performance in a foreign country, might be used as data for two propositions: #1. That 70's performance art was meant to be woman's art, that its mode of operation was inherently feminist — performance art could not have happened if it weren't for a revolution against male power-conventions of abstraction and order and public distance; and #2. That performance art was an American art, the continuation and renovation and last gasp of Abstract Expressionism before Europe returned and fought back with Neo-expressionism — the performance-artist was the re-enactment of Jackson Pollock walking and pouring over a canvas laid on the floor, of John Wayne in a John Ford movie, the performance-artist was the anticipation of Ronald Reagan as president. This second proposition, however, was used to suppress the first: the performance-artists that the art media chose to distribute were embodiments of the American pioneer — in choosing those artists and not others, the media enforced a reading of "American" as a male — performance art was the continuation of one exploitation, American exploitation, and the start of another, a male exploitation of feminist ideology, an attempt to nip it in the bud. The thing is: who first used the word "performance" to refer to this work? which gender felt more comfortable using that word? was the connotation "sexual performance" of women before the eyes of men and in roles designed to please men? And now that we're talking like this: why were the things that we did called "pieces"? just what's being talked about here anyway, and what exactly is being grabbed at?

13

After Ballroom was over, I couldn't ever perform again. Because Ballroom now was out in the open as evidence, that stared both myself and others right in the face: it was proof that my "performances" promised

more than they (or I) could (or would) deliver. The performer remained in the end a performer, the audience remained in the end an audience: we were only playing the roles of participants, as if we were both doomed to be in a "performance" that wasn't even mine but that had been designed by some Performance God in the Sky whose tradition couldn't be broken. The (sexual, personal) relationship that joined performer and audience was never meant to be actualized, it was only potential, it was only a tease; in the end we all knew our place and we kept it; this world wasn't real but was only a model that was in the long run too fragile for people to enter — the space that was put forward as experiential turned out to be after all only visual, the action might as well have been a picture (that's the way it was going to be historically preserved anyway).

14

(I just told you a story. Now let me tell you a secret: that wasn't really my last performance. Two years later, when my work had changed into installations, I did what in fact was — honest, you can believe me this time — my final performance. It was a piece out of nowhere, a piece apparently out of context, it was as if I had come back from the dead. My performance mode, my persona, was different now: I was sitting at a table, I paged through books and read out fragments of other people's autobiographies — I was a compiler and not an originator, I was a scholar more than a practitioner. The piece didn't fit the myth that had been made of me as a performer and that I had helped make myself: that myth demanded that I be involved not in the world of books but in the world of bodies — that myth demanded that my presence be sexual and not neutered. So my last performance had to be, for all intents and purposes, Ballroom: the last gasp of performance that threw the male at the mercy of

women. All the while, the real last performance, Projection Room, was probably more true — honest, you can trust me — to my everyday life, more true to my normal representation of self: here is the person who reads and writes because that person cannot — or at least, doesn't — do. The performances that everybody knows about, on the other hand, let me do what I couldn't or wouldn't do at home.)

15

Performance art turns out to be therapeutic. It's something that people do at the beginning of their careers. Its function is to per-form art as we know it at the time and, thereby, to re-form and trans-form it. Performance art is a space in-between, a kind of half-way house that cures an addition to objects and products and allows people to function on their own power and to depend on their own persons. Sooner or later, however, a person has to get out of therapy and get on with his/her own life. The problem with performance art is that it has no place it can call its own: if it's in a theater, if it's in a gallery or museum, if it's in the street, then it fades out of its own classification and slips into that categories of those other arenas. This "problem with performance art is also the benefit of performance art: it destroys itself as it is being made — it can never be pinned down because it has already disappeared — as soon as it exists in fact, in an actual place and in an actual situation, it isn't itself, because it shares the place of something else, it breathes the air of whatever alien place it's in, it starts to become the thing that lives in that place. The ex-performance-artist, then, who had a bias toward the action of performance grows up into theater or music — the more passive of these ex-performance-artists becomes an actor, the more active becomes a rock star; the ex-performance-artist who had a bias toward the image of performance grows up into

movies or television; the ex-performance-artist who had a bias toward the situation and place of performance grows up to be something like an architect; the ex-performance-artist who had a bias toward the effects and consequences of performance grows up to be a terrorist, or a guerilla fighter, or at least a prankster.

NOTES ON WORK 1970–1971, 1980

From the catalogue *Vito Acconci. A Retrospective: 1969 to 1980*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1980.

- 1  
Assume a general condition of art-experiencing: viewer, entering exhibition area, orients himself/herself to art-work as if toward a target — viewer aims in on art-work. This target-making, then, can be used beforehand, as a condition of art-doing: I can aim in on myself, treat myself as target — my activity of target-making, then, can be treated as a target by viewers.
- 2  
Film as a general structure of self-enclosure: I'm standing in front of the camera — the camera aims at me, shoots me — all the while, I can be doing what the camera is doing, I can be aiming in on myself. (Film frame, separating what's seen on screen from the rest of the world outside, functions as an isolation chamber, meditation chamber, where I can be — where I have to be — alone with myself, where I'm forced to concentrate on myself.)
- 3  
Performance as production (I give myself a sore, a bite-mark...) — Performance as consumption (I receive the sore, the bite-mark...) — Performance as circulation.
- 4  
On the one hand, the system is open: if I turn on myself, apply stress to myself, I make myself vulnerable, make myself available to the viewer. On the other hand, the system is closed: if I am the agent of an action and at the same time, the receiver of that action, I've turned myself into a self-enclosed object, the viewer is left out, the viewer is put in the position of a voyeur, outside the window.
- 5  
If the agent comes into contact with another agent, the situation can be one that the first agent assesses while the second agent is trying to penetrate that assessment; the second agent can realize that the first agent's assessment includes, as one of its features, the fact that the second agent will try to penetrate it. When assessment is the basis of an activity, the agent can become a parasite on another agent, or the agent can absorb the other agent (performance as soap-opera).
- 6  
Video as a general structure of relationship: video as rehearsal, contrasted to film as a finished image — video as an image about to be, video as separate dots about to come together to be read as a single image. (Video is the appropriate medium, then, for a plot in which A is separate from B, A leads B on, B becomes stronger than A, A and B come together into a union...)
- 7  
If I concentrate on him/her while he/she concentrates on me, we bind ourselves together into a circle: to keep our concentration, we need no one else, we have no use for anyone else — concentrating on each other, we form a "magic circle", a "charmed circle" that no viewer can enter. (This is "theater" and not "art".)
- 8  
Instead of focusing on myself, or on another person, I can focus on you, the viewer: the exhibition area, then, is used as a exchange-point, a meeting place. (In the background: a notion of art as gift from artist to viewer.)

Once I set up a point — once I set myself up as the point — at one end of a space, the space around fades away: the space, whatever its shape, narrows into a channel between “you” and “me” (viewers flow towards that point while, at the same time, that point points to viewers: the space is there only to advance the plot).

*SOME NOTES ON FILM (PERFORMANCE AS CONCENTRATION), 1971*

1. Attention span

The performer's time can be determined by his concentration on an action: the time it takes him to get into a “meditative state”, the length of time he can maintain that state.

2. Concentrated space

His prolonged attention functions as specialization: it abstracts from his surroundings, narrows his field to the point where he is performing his action (e.g.: his body, or a section of it; a direct line from him to another party; etc.).

3. Closed region

To keep out his surrounding, the performer can place his activity in a separate chamber, or an isolated territory that requires traveling away from ordinary habitat.

4. Film as chamber

The camera frame, separating inside from out, furnishes a closed region, a channeled field for his “trance state”; the camera's steady focus gives him time to deepen that state.

5. Private region, subjective region

Closed within the frame, the performer can turn in on himself, work changes on parts of himself; or he can concentrate on another party to such an extent that the other party's identity is combined with his.

6. Intrusions into the private region

The viewer of the film acts as a spy: he gets to see what the camera frame cuts away from the whole, he gets inside, he is directed toward what the performer himself is directed to in his concentration.



NOTES ON WORK 1972–1973, 1980

7. Public domain (example)

What the performer began in privacy is presented to the viewer as a pose, an invitation; the viewer has a model on which to base, or test, potential activity of his own.

8. Camera-person as provider (“inside job”)

The camera-person has served as a preliminary spy, in conjunction with the future viewer; he has been, also, the intimate of the performer (she tells the performer what is in view, confirms his concentration, provides a check, serves as his mirror).

9. Attendance: free time

The film should be shown continuously in a small separate room, with no seats; viewers can enter and leave at any time, stay as long as they want. (They can move more freely than the camera-man: he served more as the performer’s guard, whereas they can be private detectives on their own time.)

10. Double attention

Moving freely into the small space, viewers have the choice of concentrating on the film and repeating, on their own the “trance state” of the performer; they can determine the position and time necessary for that state.

11. Film as background (starting point)

What the viewers see is a finished fact: a training ground, a temporary separation from which the performer comes away done over. (The performer leaves the private arena where he worked; the viewers leave the private arena where the film was seen.)

From the catalogue *Vito Acconci. A Retrospective: 1969 to 1980*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1980.

1

The basic structure, then, should be of the space and not within the space: nor performance in a space but performance through a space. If, for example, I’m not so clearly visible, then you the viewer can be “in a space” rather than “in front of me” — you are in a space where I happen to be in action. (In the space, we’re making a place for ourselves, together; you are performing for me as much as I’m performing for you.)

2

This is “performance” in the sense of “carrying something through” (carrying through a space — performing a space — carrying myself through you throughout a space).

3

Once I am under cover, things move too quickly, there’s nothing to stop me: since I’m not seen anyway, there doesn’t have to be a performance; since there’s no actual performance, this is only a place for potential performance; since there’s no “fact” here, I can withdraw into the past, disappear in the future; since my mode of being is so fluid, I can move through the viewer, past the viewer...

4

To stop myself, I have to come back into the space. In order to come back to the space, I have to face “you”. In order to keep facing you, I need something to anchor me in the place where you are. But I have that anchor within me: now that I’ve gone into the past (or into the future, or into metaphor), “I” can never be the same again: “I” has a history, an autobiography: the past, that I could have withdrawn into, is brought

*SOME NOTES ON MY USE OF VIDEO, 1974*

back here, imported: the past functions as a weight that keeps me in place here. In order to face you, I have to face up myself.

5

In the background: a notion of art as privacy that results in publicness — a private life makes a deposit in a public space, where private times come together in a public function. Gallery/museum, then, is used as a buffer zone: I bring something private into a public space — once that privacy is made public, I can't deny it — once it's brought back, later, to privacy, there's no reason not to face it.

1

Face-to-face contact: person on-screen faces person in front of screen. (The video-viewer is met by a screen approximately face-size — whereas, in film, the viewer encounters a screen twenty feet high.)

2

Film-landscape, silence (the sound comes from something too large to be a person — talk functions as background music, myth-making "titles"). Video close-up, sound.

3

Video-viewer sits close to the screen — the distance Edward Hall calls "personal distance", where three-dimensionality is emphasized. But the image on video is flat, grainy — video, then, serves to decrease distance, to approach Hall's "intimate distance" where vision is blurred and distorted (appropriately, the video image presents itself in dots).

4

Since sharp focus is lost, there's a dependence on sound. But it might be difficult to talk about something (Martin Joos: "An utterance in intimate distance avoids giving the addressee information from outside the speaker's skin... The point is simply to remind — hardly "inform" — the addressee of some feeling inside the speaker's skin").

5

If both the image and the sound in video are only "basic", only "outlines", there might be two approaches: either avoid habitual senses altogether, and concentrate on "pure energy" transmission — or, on the other hand, be humanly "pushy": I can push up against the screen, as if to throw myself on the viewer, as if to fight the neutrality of the situation, push myself through.

6

Video, then, as a place to keep moving, keep talking — improvise — take it back and start again — cling to my position in front of the viewer, don't give it up, don't lose his or her attention.

7

Paraphrasing Godard: video might be the fear of dots, of grayness, of neutrality, of flatness, of interference of the viewer in an armchair...

8

Charlie Chaplin (talking about the necessity for long shots in film comedy): "There's nothing comic about a face twenty feet tall". In contrast, the face on video can be handled — with a little effort, you can bounce it around like a ball. (Possibly video makes it hard to work in a single key — no spectacle, nothing sacred; it thickens, or muddies, the plot.

9

Earlier pieces of mine played on the notions of the monitor, the video box: either I was alone, working with myself in feedback, or I worked with another person, either in physical "combat" or in a kind of ESP test. The viewer was placed outside a private chamber, watching a goal being reached (cf. the living-room situations of TV soap-opera, talk-shows).

10

The more recent pieces might be said to play on the notion of video "dots": the monitor is a point in a space that includes the viewer, a circle that's completed by the viewer — my point points to the viewer, jabs at the viewer (cf. TV newscasts, commercials).

11

My first question is: where am I in relation to the viewer — above, below, to the side, hidden...Once this is established, then I can figure out the reason for my physical position, I can decide what I have to do, what I should say.

12

Problem: it's hard for me to take a videotape as seriously as an installation piece (the installation can, of course, include video — but, in that case, the tape is part of the whole situation, and not a videotape in itself — e.g. *Command Performance* at 112 Green Street). At the same time, I probably think of certain video pieces of mine as more "perfect", more "complete" than most of my installation pieces.

13

The problem is that it's too easy to have a "complete" videotape because the terms — as they seem to exist now, in the normal "artist" tape — are limited, isolated: there's no real viewing context that can be considered as part of the terms of the piece. (E.g., if the context were a public broadcast, then a piece would require considerations of dispersal, various geographical areas, particular viewing times, etc., in the same way that I would consider particular quirks of a room for an installation.)

14

The problem is that a videotape is "thrown into" a gallery. The room is usually darkened, probably with fixed seating — the tape, then, becomes a spectacle and loses its quality of "home companion": there's a crowd of people in front of a monitor — too many faces to come face to face with; there might be more than one monitor showing the same tape — so that I can't have a definite point to stand in.

*10-POINT PLAN FOR VIDEO, Summer 1975*

15

Possibilities for a viewing situation: two walls, each about eight feet square, facing each other, about three feet between them — the video monitor is placed in the middle of one wall, at eye-level — the sound is adjusted to normal speaking volume (the viewer, then, has to actively meet the image: he can stand outside and catch only glimpses only mumblings: or he can squeeze in between the walls and edge up to it: or he can step right up and put his face against the screen).

1

Video as an idea, as working method, rather than a specific medium, a particular piece — something to keep in the back of my mind while I'm doing something else. (It can bring me up front, pull me back onto the surface, keep me from slipping away into abstraction.)

2

Thinking of landscape in terms of movie (I'm forced then to treat landscape as dream, myth, history of a culture). Thinking of person, close-up, in terms of video (I'm forced then to treat person as on-the-spot news, convoluted soap-opera.)

3

Video monitor as one point in a face-to-face relationship: on-screen, I face the viewer, off-screen. (Since the image is poorly defined, we're forced to depend on sound more than sight: "intimate distance".)

4

Starting point: where am I in relation to the viewer — above, below, to the side? Once my position is established, the reasons for that position shape the content: I can improvise, keep talking, fight to hold my stance in front of the viewer. (At the same time, I'm fighting the neutrality of the medium by pushing myself up against the screen — I'm building an image for myself lest I dissolve into dots, sink back into grayness.)

5

But my image breaks the face-to-face contact: the viewer faces a screen of me, an image under glass, me-in-a-fishbowl. Rather than being in a situation with me, the viewer is in front of a situation about me.

6

In order to keep up my image, I should give up my person. I could be dead — and, therefore, have no recourse but this ghost of myself; or I could simplify myself into a cardboard figure (superior stance: “I’m here to give you information, that’s all you need to know, you’ll never get me” — or inferior stance: “I’m begging for charity, I’m not good for anything else, take me”) — and therefore, give up the need for a changing and equalized relationship.

7

The alternative is to leave out my image, stay behind the scenes. The video monitor, then, can function as a middle ground, a depository for objects — an area where I, off-screen on one side, can hand things over to the viewer, off-screen on the other side. The viewer and I can be concerned about the objects while we’re with each other. (Since objects are screened to begin with, since they don’t talk back, their mode of presence is adaptable to the screen: their image doesn’t interfere with our contact.)

8

The catch is: the screen-person might be the normal state — video might be a model for an existent situation, a socio-political ambiance that turns people into screens of themselves. (The choice, then, to substitute objects could be a way to refuse that situation, to escape that control.)

9

In any case, my ground is clear: the most available showing places for my work are museums and galleries. to show my face, with the hope that a viewer will come in front of it, is to make a tacit assumption that the gallery provides a fertile ground for relationship: in effect, I’m clouding the economic and social meaning

of the gallery. (To use the monitor instead as a kind of gift-box, a calling-card, could be a way if saying: let’s be sneaky, don’t show your hand.)

10

But I’ve depended too much on the video monitor, needed sit physical qualities as impulses for content. It’s time to break out. Consider, for example, video projection: the “punch” of video, the quality of the image coming out at you, is a punch that can be thrown, like throwing a ball — now you don’t see it — there it is in the back of your mind — a punch at the back of your hand.



SOME NOTES ON PEOPLED SPACE, 1977

[...] Performance is single-directed (the move is toward me, or toward you): I could frame it, handle it, on the spot. Once desire was multi-directed (history, culture), I had to go behind the scenes (there was too much to put my finger on — I had to go into the background to consider it all).

\*

Background: when the pieces were live. In the late 60s and early 70s, inner-directness — “self-searching” — seemed to have a function according to the tenor of the times. But the times had changed: in 1973 (the time of my last live pieces) we were almost half-way through another decade. What had seemed like a necessary means to depth now seemed like specialization, escapism. “Self” seemed more elusive. In the 60s, one could make a direct approach — after all, the world had opened up. In the 70s you had to be more sneaky.

\*

Once I “left the stage”, once I was behind the scenes, the space turned from a performance-area to a *potential* performance-area. It was implied that I could go there at any time — but, of course, so could you, our terms were more equal. There wasn’t an actual performance to fix the space into an image; the space retained time.

\*

Background: the first non-live pieces. I still had old habits: I kept my attention on “me” — “you” came in “me”, walked through “me”. The space was from and for me: it was as if the viewer was walking into my mind. (The space, then, was turned from *fact* to *metaphor*: there was nothing there but me — and I wasn’t there, was I? — so the viewer was walking on air.)

\*

Things had to be brought down to earth: since I wasn’t there, since I was only an instrument now, I had to find my ground, outside of me. (I couldn’t depend on a ground that was only a substitute for me — there was nothing there to plant my feet on.) What I had to do was: shift my attention from source (myself) to result (the place where the piece would be).

\*

[...] The artist, then, becomes a kind of guerrilla fighter: the gallery is treated as a terrain to explore (the gallery is a sign, a model, of the culture it’s in) — I set up a piece according to the terrain (ideally the piece should be done quickly, should be done as cheaply as possible) — setting up the piece is like setting up a trap — once the trap works, it can’t be used again (the piece can’t be repeated, what worked in one place won’t work in another) — once the piece is set up I can move on, quickly, to another terrain.

\*

Since a gallery or museum space is a place where people gather, that space can be used as a meeting place. The custom is: people are together here in order to be alone (be alone with the art, forget who’s around). Change that by bringing people together in order to be together: the art becomes a place for them, a place that props them up, rather than a space they transfer to an image in front of them. The gallery-space can call people to a meeting, can call the meeting to order: the gallery is used as a town square. [...]

*SOME BEGINNINGS FOR AN ESSAY ON NEW YORK, 1977*

1

"Doing art" and "doing art in New York" are two separate categories, two distinct careers, however parallel they may become in practice — one is not, simply, a follow-up, or a corollary, of the other. This is the course: a person, say, leaving art-school, has a decision to make: "be an artist" or "be a New York artist".

2

Being an artist in New York means: being an artist as we know it (art by news, art for news). Being an artist outside of New York means: being an artist as we, once, a long time ago, imagined it (art for history, art by history). The New York artist, of course, can have history in the front of his/her mind; but this history is supported by, pre-formed by, currency, news (horse pulls cart). The non-New York artist jumps to history, skips over news (cart needs no horse), disdains support — or, more precisely, resorts to a self-defined self as support, rather than the other-defined self of "news".

3

Not being in New York means: giving up connectedness. Being in New York means: giving up separability. (But this separability — e.g., separation from a social/business world — was, probably, one of the motives for art-activity in the first place; it was this separability that was one of the inherent characteristics of "dream-art", "art-dream".)

4

Doing art in New York means: doing "public art". Since publicity channels are placed there, the art that is done there is complete only when it enters those channels, when it uses and is used by those channels: ideally, New York art doesn't exist until it is made public. Publicness, rather than being a by-product that

just happens to come about in time, is an inherent quality of the work itself, of the working method. Instead of just two terms (art-worker and art-work), there is a lurking third term (art experiencer/observer), without which there's no combination of the other two terms into "artness" (as we know it enough to say it).

5

Art-activity outside New York means: "art as time" (art as meditation, artist alone with artwork). But, in New York, the third term mentioned above interrupts the union of the first two terms: there's no time for art as we knew it before New York (whatever place-name it had then) came into existence. Art-activity in New York means: "art as space" (art as ownership of art/ownership of style). Or, to transpose: non-New York art is "art as space" (wide-open spaces, outer space); New York art is "art as time" (racing against the clock).

6

To clarify, condense, the notion of "public" (to make that public more immediate), a New York "block" is formed: this is not so much a community as a principle of community-formation that can be embodied conveniently because of the availability of mass. This block allows for, requires on its side, diverse artists, varying styles, this the attempt is to account for all possible theoretical attitudes. Each artist has to know his/her place; each has to recognize the other's place, no matter how alien that place may be: the block lasts as long as its parts correspond (acknowledge each other).

7

Once the block is solid enough, there is born a "New York art" that can be transported, taught, emulated. "It's so because we say it's so": don't ask questions.

*DOUBLE-SPACING (SOME NOTES ON RE-PLACING PLACE)*  
June 1978

(On the other hand, the non-New York artist can only say: "It's so because I think it is, I think I can, I think I can..." If the non-New York artist says "we", the reference is only to the dead, to some ideal of future living, to the assumption of a kindred spirit in some far-away place.)

8  
Since "New York art" can be so easily transported to other countries, proof is given that it's non-regional, universal: it secedes from America, becomes non-historical (so that it can establish its own non-cultural history, find a place in that history). When, for the sake of the survival of its own system, "New York art" questions the universal and analyzes it into political parts, the sources drawn from are not American but European: on the one hand, this reasserts its own universality, its existence in a "TV world" — on the other hand, this allows the art to become a "starry-eyed child" again, a child of culture (as we've been used to knowing it).

9  
However universal the art may claim to become, it needs, once in a while, to re-familiarize itself, name itself, stake out its New-Yorkness (or else it might spread itself too thin, dissipate itself out of existence). It finds a home, then, an index, in a magazine like this, in an issue like this. By being named, it can serve as a decoy: the illusion is created that — if a "special New York issue" is necessary — then, the rest of the time, the magazine must be dealing with multi-local art, "wide art".

1  
Begin before the beginning, with a convenient assumption: since a piece will turn out to be (unless I were willing to do something to stop it) participant in an art-context anyway (through reportage, situation of artist's reputation, etc.), then — rather than come back, hangdog-like, into that context from the side — a piece might as well start there, in the heart of that context (assuming, further, that the source for — support of — art news, art media, remains (at least for the time being) gallery/museum...

2  
My conception of space, then, is "closed": my place has been (grudgingly, grudgingly...) settled: a piece is to be done in-a-gallery-space / for-a-gallery-space — a piece is done in the place where people (who share in an art context) come together...

3  
So I gain a function, I can name names: I become a "gallery artist" (I adjust to the gallery space, let a piece be determined by the particular quirks of a gallery space) — I'm here to re-design, re-decorate, a gallery — I'm working as a behavioral designer for an already-defined (pre-behavioral) art public...

4  
(In the background, a romanticized image of "artist": consider the gallery a terrain — I become a guerrilla fighter — I search out the terrain, do a piece according to that terrain — set up, prepare to take down, move out, move on...)

5  
But, of course, I'm an insider, I've been within that (supposedly enemy) terrain from the start: so you look down, from an institutionalized peak, from above you

can see all those gangs of milling people: zoom in closer: I can blink and use "art-public" as my substitute (what else have we got?) for "group", "tribe"...

6

Image-structure A: Table / chairs: this sets the gallery down, puts the space in place (and then, in turn, puts in place the people who happen to be sitting there): since people are going to be in the gallery anyway, the gallery can be used as a community-meeting-place — or, more precisely, a place where a community might find itself, form itself, in order to, afterwards, have a meeting, group together...

7

Behind it all then, before the space is "closed": a conception of space as "flow" (like waves of sand that roll people over those waves — or, conversely, like waves of people supporting, pushing, layers of sand over themselves, sand that can't have an edge as long as those people keep moving...): in order to think about space, I have to give "flow" a "stop": once it's stopped, an image is formed which, afterwards, can be placed in its own habitat (gallery, for one): now that the image is located in a gallery, I can — from the outside, about to go in — get an image of the gallery as a whole only to break it up into flows of a (playpen) space...

8

Say that the gallery, laboratory-like, becomes extensive: on the one hand, the gallery is seen as one point in an over-all geographical / historical / cultural space — on the other hand, the gallery is seen (looked over) as a model of that cultural space, a pointer to that cultural space...

9

A piece, then, is done in / for a particular "cultural space" (a piece in New York should be different from a piece in LA should be different from a piece in Milan should be different from a piece in Cologne... this is 1976, this is 1977, this is 1978...).

10

What *goes to* a particular place *comes from* a particular place: I'm doing the piece as a particularly placed (timed) person (I'm an American artist, I'm doing a piece in Europe — I'm the one that got away, I've come back "home" — I'm in an art-situation where American art is the economic standard, I function as an advertisement for American art, I'm here as a representative of American business interests...)

11

Particular-culture / Particular — language: gallery as a prop for language — a physical structure is built in the gallery in order to, literally, carry a voice / audio tape ("I admit it, there's someone behind what you see..."): here is where I lay down my language, here is where I speak your language...

12

On the one hand, audio tape blows the place apart (whereas the physical structure is a *fact*, voice can change the facts, thicken the plot); on the other hand, audio tape keeps people in place (the community-meeting, then, is a fake, no one can talk back, the voice keeps going on, language becomes oppression, a weight equivalent to the weight of the physical construction...); but now there's no place for people to be kept in, since the words have already changed that place...

13

Image-structure B: Ladder (since the gallery is a pass-through space, there can always be another way out, an easier way out — gallery as the desire to be elsewhere...).

14

Image-structure C: Wall (just when an idea of “culture” tends to take over, and the head is somewhere in the clouds, the viewer comes back down, driven to the wall: just when viewers think they’re about to pass through the gallery, as easy as that, it can happen that the walls are closing in on them, pushing them one against the other, back to back and belly to belly, back to the wall: “public distance” narrows, reduced to “intimate distance”...).

15

In the background, a notion of art as a gift: exchange between artist and viewer: this is the place where “I” meet “you”: but, as long as “I” am here, in person, “I” have the floor, “I” am by custom on a stage that you can only stand in front of as a spectator: for “you” to have room of your own, room to move, “I” have to clear out: only when “I” am out of the picture can “we” have our say... (but, since it’s hard to put the finger on “us”, “you” have to have something to do in the meantime...).

16

Image-structure D: Machine (a physical structure that tightens, ties the gallery-space together, can just as easily be loosened, untied: as long as viewers are here, biding their time, there’s nothing to stop them from pressing a button, pulling a string, letting it all fall apart: get up from the table, away from the wall, off the ladder, and down to business...).

17

Theoretically, then, there shouldn’t be any “gallery-problem”: the machine has turned in on itself, there’s been an explosion: by this time, all those ladders should have taken me out of the gallery, all those machines should have broken through all those walls — after all, instead of setting up table inside the gallery, and “transforming” it into a meeting-place, I could have gone at the start straight to a town square...

18

But, then, I have to come back to the assumption I began with here: and I have to remember, all the while, that my aim has been not to use “art” in order to deal with space but, instead, to use space in order to deal with “art”... (Once that “art” is dealt with, it can function as an instrument that can be turned out again into an ever-spreading space...)

19

Or put it another way, come at it by a different direction: I could have, all the while, come in from the outside: rather than start with a given space (and fitting into it, fitting it out), I could have ignored it, stood outside and dropped something in, letting that “something” fall / cling / sprawl where it might (like television, say, going into millions of unknown homes...): rather than adjust to the space, I could have reared back and thrown in another space, on top of it (but, since it wouldn’t have to meet with any resistance, it would have to be a space that’s timed to go off, a space there’s no time to be in, no place to be...).



1

Every art-work falls under — on the part of both artist and viewer — the assumption of an atmosphere of authoritarianism. The art-work makes an appearance as if out of nowhere, as if it's existed from all time (art, e.g., as the black monolith in *2001*): since you can't put your finger on where it began, the piece presents itself to be wondered at, venerated (whether for reasons of finance or "culture") — the art, in other words, is bigger than you are.

2

This authoritarianism might be counteracted, deceptively, by another assumption: that of an atmosphere of the visionary. The appearance of an art-work, in our culture, produces the assumption that there exists, somewhere behind it (before it), an art-agent whose "vision" this is. On the one hand, the visionary confirms the authoritarianism: the vision can't be questioned, it's granted the right to exist as an "imaginary world". On the other hand, the visionary puts the authoritarianism in quotes: the art-work is allowed to take on the guise of "authoritarianism" because, after all, it's only art, only the artist talking into the wind. The artist and viewer, then, enter into a contract of play-authority, playing at being victimizer and victim.

3

These two assumptions function as art standards; any work of art is done, then, in order to — purposefully or not — confirm or deny them. The denial, however, is always futile: the denial is always only a desire to deny. Since, then, art in effect *means* "authoritarianism", and "visionary", there must be some reason why people who claim to be repulsed by these notions engage in art anyway: there must be something "authoritarian" and "visionary" that they as

a matter of fact want. For example: an artist might consider "visionary" to be "escapist" yet, at the same time, be attracted to "future studies"; or an artist might consider "authoritarian" to be "fascist" yet, at the same time, be attracted to inclusive systems, or to the voice of the past, or to the clarification of that voice so that it can be outshouted, as in the killing of a father. All art-activity, then, places itself in the past and the future. The artist has various ways of trying, desperately, to remain in the present.

4

Example A. If a piece is performed live, by the agent who made it, then the source of the piece is demystified, it's clear — right before the viewer's eyes — where the piece came from. The problem here is that any subject matter is available only through the artist's viewpoint (literally, since the artist is on-stage); anyone who knows a piece by an artist knows what the artist looks like — the artist functions as the object of a personality cult. The avoidance of authoritarianism means a loss of publicness, a retreat into the private.

5

Example B. If the viewer is the focal point of a piece, the piece pushes a viewer up against the wall: the piece functions as a parody of authoritarianism — the hoped-for result is that the viewer, once pushed so far, has second thoughts and begins to react against the oppression he/she has been victimized for. The immediate problem here is that the viewer who doesn't get the joke has been further victimized; the more general problem is that even the viewer who does get the joke has been numbed, and therefore unable to analyze (the viewer is "tingled" but not "thinking"). The avoidance of the visionary, with its room to escape in, its openness, has resulted in closure, the objectification of the viewer, a loss of personness.

TELEVISION, FURNITURE & SCULPTURE: THE ROOM WITH  
THE AMERICAN VIEW, 1984

6

Example C. If a piece is designed for viewers' use, then the piece is on the same plane as the viewers, and not above them; the piece is changeable, according to viewers' use. The problem here is that the terms of change have been limited by the artist; the piece offers only a supermarket freedom. Another problem is that the viewer is given an illusion of power that is operative only in the laboratory conditions of an art context and that couldn't be exercised so conveniently outside. The avoidance of authoritarianism leads to complacency, the viewer's self-satisfaction; the function of art becomes reactionary.

From the catalogue *The Luminous Image*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

1

Television space is fishbowl space. There's a world going on in there: that exclamation might be made by a child-person looking, from out of the large world he/she is in, into the small world behind either the aquarium-glass or the TV-screen. In the case of TV, the world is *on* something, on-screen, not (as in the case of the aquarium) *in* something, in the bowl; but, unlike movies, the TV screen isn't all, there's something behind it, something underneath it all — the TV tube lies behind the screen. We know that the screen is only the facade of the box; even now that the screen can be drastically reduced in size — as in the two-inch "watchman" — there still has to be room for the TV tube, the TV box screen might be thought of as the window into the box — except that we probably can't, in 1984, be innocent enough to believe we're really looking through a window, really peering inside the box. Rather, the screen might be seen as some kind of distorting, inside-out mirror, which the power inside the box holds up to the world at large. Inside the box, the world — or the power-to-be-a-world — is condensed: it's the size of a conventional package, a gift, it's power made handleable. The viewer might be led to believe, then, that the world is in his or her hands.

2

The close-up literalizes television. The close-up face is the same size as the TV screen; the face on-screen, then, is a fact, just as the TV set is a fact in the living-room. Whereas on a movie-screen a close-up face is at least fifteen times the size of an actual face (so that the face on film is a landscape, like John Wayne's face, a face to walk around on — the face is distant, out-of-reach, like a landscape outside a train window,

untouchable, like Greta Garbo's face; or the face is a monument or a monster — it comes up from the ground or the grave, it comes from another time), on a TV-screen a close-up face is approximately the same size as an actual face: "his"/"her" face and "my" face are face-to-face — we're in the same world — this is here and now. The viewer and the face on-screen are comfortable with each other: the news from that face, then, is assumed, taken as a fact. But then second thoughts might come up: if this is a face, where's the body? The face on-screen is a detached head: a head-without-a-body-without-organs. This is pure mind, without a body to ground it; this is a head that floats, and can't (won't) come down to earth. The news from that face is news from nowhere. (The world is nowhere: if the world were placed, then we might be able to handle it, control it.)

3

Watching television is like staring into a fireplace, or looking at a light bulb. The viewer is "heated": information has been passed. "I'm not myself", the viewer might justifiably say. Well, who are you then? You are what you see. There's no time to think; information has already been implanted in the brain. The viewer has television inside the self, like a cancer (the disease that has become the dominant disease of the time, the time in which television has become the dominant medium); the person is "replaced", "displaced" (as in *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*). Television is a rehearsal for the time when human beings no longer need to have bodies. The way a movie projector shoots images onto a movie screen, the television set "shoots" images into the viewer: the viewer functions as a screen. With television, a person finally is enabled to become a "model person" — but what the person is a model of is non-self. The person functions as a "screen", a simulation, of self.

Television confirms the diagnosis that the boundaries between inside and outside are blurred: the diagnosis that "self" is an out-dated concept. (Saying the word "myself" has been reassuring: it announces possession, claims something to grab onto: writing the word "I", in English, is similar to writing the numeral "1" — it gives the illusion of placement in a hierarchy of importance.)

4

Television broadcasts the same program, all over a particular country, at the same time. One world is transported into different worlds: each different world (different household) is kept in place (in step, in line, in time) by the importation of the same ("universal") world. When a TV set, in a particular household, is turned off, that world is lying in wait, the world-within-the-TV-set ready to erupt, to flash on "in the middle of things" (the plot has already been going on without us). "It" is always there, though we might not be yet, we might not be watching. But people in some other house are already watching: "it" has plenty of time, plenty of viewers already — and, anyway, we'll probably come around to watch sooner or later. This wave of sameness, about to enter everywhere, could be seen either as "frightening" (as a loss of individuality: all those supposedly particular "Is" about to be entered by "it") or as "reassuring" (as a unification of people in community, or as something to fall back on: regularity in the midst of psychological and sociological variables). One way television, in its early days, was made to appear "reassuring" was by means of its housing: the introduction of the TV console — the TV appeared in the home as furniture, like any other furniture. The non-physicality of television was made physical; the air was grounded and brought down to earth. This was something we could "feel at home with". The sameness imported into the home did not

have to be seen as anonymity: rather, it could be seen as the sameness of furniture, the sameness of clothing and fashion — a sign of comfort and equality.

5

Looked at from the viewpoint of art, furniture is analogous to sculpture. Just as furniture fits into a room, and takes up floor-space, inside a house, sculpture fits into and takes up space in an art-exhibition area. Take this “thing”: it isn’t as big as a room, so it’s only furniture; it isn’t as big as architecture, so it’s only sculpture. In its early days, the TV set took, inside the house, the position of specialized furniture: the position of sculpture. It was like other furniture, but there were differences: it couldn’t be sat in, like a chair; it couldn’t be sat at, like a table; part of the console could, as a by-product, function like a cabinet, for storage, but not the TV-part itself. Compared to other furniture, the television set couldn’t be used, it could only be looked at; it had the uselessness that one associates with art. A person could walk around the TV set, the way a person could walk around a sculpture; but, in order to see what was being transmitted, the person would have to look at it frontally (the way a sculpture is looked at in photographs: photographs being the most convenient way a sculpture becomes known, since a sculpture is harder to move than a painting — the world of art-distribution, the world of art-books, is predicated on frontality and therefore on painting). But recently there’s been a change in the shape of television: the mode of television is no longer the unmovable console but the portable. What was analogous to sculpture is now, at first glance, more analogous to painting: the TV set is too “thick”, too deep, to be a painting (though soon-to-be-possible, probably, and maybe already existent in privileged cases, is the dream of the paper-thin TV). At the moment, anyway, the

conventional TV set is neither painting nor sculpture: television evades the world of art — television is too much science to be art.

6

The connotation of television is: science and technology. In the 50s, this spelled terror to the American home: science belonged to the Russians, the Russians had put the first person into space, outer space was the Russians’ territory (cf. science-fiction movies of the that time — like *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *The Thing* — which equated the unknown with the “Red Menace”, “the Communist spy”). In an atmosphere like that, bringing science into the home, in the shape of a bare TV, would have been like inviting to dinner a composite of Dr. Frankenstein and Kim Philby. So science had to be domesticated: turned into furniture, it was nothing to be afraid of, it was something to relax with. But then things changed; by 1969, the first person to step on the moon was an American, the American flag was implanted on the moon. Science wasn’t frightening anymore, the heavens were brought down to (an American) earth, the future was now. More recently, therefore, there hasn’t been the need to camouflage the science-look of television inside the hand-crafted-looking console; the hand-crafted look could be seen as the old world, the European world, cowboy again — and the cowboy traveled spare and lean, with tenuous connections to “home”, the cowboy was the “Swinging Single”. The new sparseness and leanness could be exemplified in the sleekness of the television set; the new TV set has been allowed, encouraged, to announce its hi-tech background. Television, now, is science-fiction dropped into the middle of your home: television (as well as stereo equipment, etc.) is science turned into a pet. The viewer/consumer can have part of what NASA has, what Bell Telephone Labs have: science becomes democratized.

7

Assume that there are two kinds of power: economic power and sexual power. What new TV-equipment does, now, is camouflage economic power: it gives the buyer the illusion that economic power is in his/her hands — after all, the buyer can prove it, the buyer can hold the state-of-the-art in a box (as if looking at himself/herself in a photograph, like other people, in other photographs, holding the state-of-the-art in a box). And holding it, and looking at it later in the privacy of his/her home, and making that home a show-place where equipment can be shown off to friends — all this is a way of draining sexual power. Because television is the absence of the body: television signifies the body-become-electronics, the body-without-sex. This sexlessness, then, is placed in the home, in exactly those spots where the body runs rampant: the woman watches the TV set in the kitchen, as she prepares food — the couple watches the TV set at the foot of their bed, right before sexual intercourse. The sexlessness of the television set functions as a sign, a reminder; it induces a nostalgia not so much for the past as for a fiction of the future: “If only we didn’t need to eat”, “if only we didn’t desire to fuck”...

8

Since television represents an absence, a difference, it has to be seen as at least slightly out-of-place in the home. It has to look more “hi-tech” than anything else in the home. Science, though democratized, still flaunts its future (science, talking democracy, announces capitalism): the current TV set is being out-dated at the very moment it is looked at — the fact that it’s so advanced says only that “you ain’t seen nothin’ yet”. The viewer, the buyer, owns only a piece of the future: the viewer, the buyer, has only a model, only a toy version, of technological development.

Science maintains itself as ungraspable, while at the same time promising itself as “dreams money can buy”. The toy version of science announces that matter is governable, with money; its secret message is: once matter is governed, then sex will be governed along with it. Having money, then, might be the opposite of the possibility of “buying sex”; having money might be a matter of “buying out” sex, getting rid of sex, the way the business-person gets rid of the opposition. Toy-science allows a person in the role of television-viewer to practice other roles: practice for a role in the world of the rich, practice for a role in the world of no-body.

9

The TV-consumer practices the role of the TV-producer. The means is the field of home-made video. Theoretically, cable TV is public-access TV — anyone can have a program on cable television. The connotation of home-made video, put on cable television, is: this is television from one home to another — television like a cookbook, like a recipe handed down from grandmother. The proof of this is: you can see the seams show — this is television with its pants down. Home-made television presents itself as evidence and prophecy: this is both the past and the future of television. On the one hand, this is television on-the-cheap, before corporations and advertising slicked it up (but this past is a simulated past: TV came into existence only by means of the money provided by corporations and advertising). On the other hand, this is television by the people and for the people (but this future is an abstract future, without real-time political determinants).

10

Art-video might be placed as a sub-category of home-made video. Or it might be placed on a sliding scale



somewhere between home-made video on the one side and regular-broadcast television on the other side. Wherever it is located, theoretically, art-video is grounded, practically, in America. The fact is: getting hold of video-equipment at all, not to mention getting hold of more sophisticated video-equipment, is easier for artists living in America. Making the choice to do video, then, is the privilege of someone who participates in a power-culture. Video-art might be considered as American art's last-ditch attempt to retain hegemony (an hegemony that, furthermore, could be retained by employing the style of an American tradition: a push toward more and more airiness, a push for purity, like chasing after Moby Dick), before Europe fought back with Neo-expressionism. Neo-expressionism was, for one thing, a last desperate attempt to retain the body in an electronic world where the body was in the process of disappearing — in this sense, Neo-expressionism is like jogging, or aerobic-dancing. But jogging, and aerobic-dancing, are also badges, proofs, of income and class: the signs of a rising young-professional upper-middle class. So Neo-expressionism, just as it brought back the body to a world-at-large that was becoming body-less, brought back "body" substantiveness, to art at the time it was talked about as being object-less. Neo-expressionism courted collectors by giving them something they could, at the same time, put their minds to and put their hands on: Neo-expressionism confirmed the body-consciousness of a wealthy class and, at the same time, gave collectors something to do again, something to collect. The desperate American attempt at hegemony, then, advertising video-art as the product, was still-born: it concentrated too much on production and not enough on accumulation — since video-art was inherently multiple, it couldn't attract the collector, who needed to acquire something unique. The video-artist, born in a situation of power,

had no power of his/her own, that could go outside the self. Like a spoiled child, then, the video-artist had the luxury of playing at power: the video-artist could take on all the roles in a solitary world. On the one hand, video-art could claim the advantage of the context of regular-broadcast television (since this is the tool of big business, video-art must have power and influence); on the other hand, at the same time, video-art could claim the advantage of home-made video (since the video-artist isn't part of the commercial television system, the video-artist must be the people's artist.)

11

The sensibility drawn to regular-broadcast television is willing to give up the name "artist" and slide off into the category of "TV producer". This type of sensibility shows self-sufficiency: it doesn't need the name "art" to justify one's own existence — art is seen as, on the one hand, a bag of tricks (skills, crafts) and, on the other hand, an attitude, a piloting device, that can be applied to any number of roles ("there's no art, we just try to do things the best way we can"). This type of sensibility is comfortable with the notions of "summary" and "condensation", and doesn't feel the need for "experience" (this sensibility would, probably, prefer driving to walking, choose the airplane over the railroad). In a world before video (or, more precisely, further back than that: in a world before mass media), this type of sensibility would have turned, probably — for lack of anything else — to painting: this type of sensibility feels comfortable with walls, and with standing in front of a wall — it feels no need for a floor to walk around on. At the same time, this sensibility feels uncomfortable with walls confined to one kind of place, like the walls of a museum; between the time of the dominance of painting and the time of the dominance of television, this sensibility would be

drawn to posters on the sides of buildings — or to (miniature) walls that can be turned, like comic books.

12

The alternative sensibility — that of the video-artist who turns toward home-made video — might leave the arena (of distribution) altogether, and withdraw into the gallery/museum. Video, there, is shown as an exhibit (like a wild animal exhibit): video is brought into the museum and displayed as an artifact of the twentieth century — the way period furniture, for example, is displayed elsewhere in the museum. The sensibility drawn to the gallery/museum is unsure of itself: it needs the terms “art” and “artist” to fall back on. This sensibility has to “gather in” rather than “spread out”; anything, from any field, can be used for art-doing, but whatever is used has to be imported into the category of art (rather than allowing the category of art to dissipate itself into other fields). This type of sensibility, in a time before video (before mass media), would have turned, probably, toward sculpture: this sensibility needs a space to be in, needs something tangible to grab on to. This sculpture-sensibility might begin by having a tendency to go outside, where it could have the space of town and country to work in — but, once outside, that sensibility is in danger of sliding into the category of “architecture”. To stop that slide, and keep for itself the name “art”, this sensibility has to resort to an architecture that already exists. This sensibility needs an enclosure into which something can be fit, like squeezing a figure into an alcove. Inside the gallery/museum, the video-monitor is placed on a pedestal or base. The video situation is transformed into a theater situation: inside a room, the TV monitor is set up in front of rows of seats — the lights are out (video shoots back into the past, into the world of movies). This situation might cause the sculpture-

sensibility to have nagging doubts: it has kept the name “artist” only to lose the name “sculptor” — “sculpture” slips into “performance art”. To preserve the term “sculpture”, this type of sensibility might have to resort to the paradox of “video installation”.

13

Video installation is the conjunction of opposites (or, to put it another way: video installation is like having your cake and eating it, too). On the one hand, “installation” places an art-work in a specific site, for a specific time (a specific duration and also, possibly, a specific historic time). On the other hand, “video” (with its consequences followed through: video broadcast on television) is placeless: at least, its place can’t be determined — there’s no way of knowing the particular look of all those millions of homes that receive the TV broadcast. Video installation, then, places placelessness; video installation is an attempt to stop time. The urge toward video installation might be nostalgic: it takes airplane travel, where all you can see is sky, and imposes onto it the landscape incidences of a railroad journey. Video installation returns the TV set to the domain of furniture; the TV set, in the gallery/museum, is surrounded by the sculptural apparatus of the installation, the way the TV set, in the home, is surrounded by the furnishings of the room. The difference is: in the home, the TV set is assumed as a home-companion, almost unnoticed, a household pet that can be handled and kicked around; the viewer doesn’t have to keep his/her eyes focused on the TV screen, the TV set remains on while the viewer (the home-body) comes and goes, the viewer goes to get something in the kitchen and brings it back to the TV set. Once a TV set, however, is placed in a sculpture-installation, the TV set tends to dominate; the TV set acts as a target — the rest of the installation functions as a display-device, a support-

structure for the light on the screen (the viewer stares into the television set, as if staring into a fireplace). The rest of the installation is in danger of fading away; the rest of the installation is the past that upholds the future (as embodied in the TV set), but the future wins. Video-installation starts out by dealing with a whole system, a whole space; but the field, the ground, disappears in favor of the "point", the TV set. The situation seems similar to wanting what you can't have; now that the TV set is camouflaged by the apparatus of an installation, an extra effort is made to find it, to "get the point". The reason for this might be that the conventional location for a television set is in the home; when it is come upon elsewhere, whether inside a gallery/museum or outside, in a store-window or a supermarket, the viewer is stopped in his/her tracks: the situation is like that of a visitor from another planet happening upon a TV set — only in this case it is the "other planet" (the home, the living-room) that comes upon the viewer, seeing the TV set, is brought back home — and here, abstractly, "home" reads the way it could never be allowed to read when surrounded by the customs of living-room furniture: "home" means "resting place", "the final resting place", the land of the numb/the still/the dead.

14

If the electronics of TV makes it comparable to science-fiction, then the sculpture part of a video installation brings the science-fiction down to earth: there's a mix to genres — the genre of science-fiction is brought together with the genre of the *film noir*, the gangster flick. The way a viewer moves around a sculpture, the detective moves over the street-space looking for clues, finding the body (and, after that, trying to find the agent that caused the body to be considered no longer a "person" but only a "body"). The detective-story might drift off into another genre,

that of the horror movie — the body becomes the body that couldn't, wouldn't, die. If television posit the body-that-disappears-into-thin-air, then sculpture counters that by positing the body-that-can't-die. Sculpture, while refusing the urge for the supernatural that painting reveals, betrays the urge for something even more unnatural: the urge for permanence, the urge to be the un-dead. Sculpture, placed under the cover of its father/mother architecture, yearns, finally, to be experienced; it can't always depend on being photographed and documented, because then it would lose its category — sculpture drifts off into painting of photography. This doesn't mean that the only way each person knows sculpture is by experiencing it; of course a person can know it through photographs — but that knowledge is sufficient only because it includes the knowledge that, somewhere, the sculpture is already being experienced by somebody else. (It's not enough to know that somebody *already has* experienced it, in the past, now that the sculpture no longer exists: in that case, sculpture drifts off into the realm of "archaeology".) Sculpture, in order to be experienced, has to be preserved; it has to exist the way a city exists, long enough to be taken for granted. The sculptor, then, whatever other intentions he/she might claim to have, is always engaged in an act of conservatism: though the means might be the apparent flaunting of traditions, the end is the most traditional, the most conservative, of all — making the being that refuses to die. The sculptor, then, who tries to thicken his plot, the sculptor who imports video into his/her object-installation, might be a person who's afraid of being out-dated, a person embarrassed about clinging so hard to the past.

HOME-BODIES. AN INTRODUCTION TO MY WORK 1984-85,  
1985

First published in *Vito Acconci: The House and Furnishings as Social Metaphor*, catalogue, University of South Florida, Tampa, 1986.

The prototype piece is a house: a piece should be the kind of place in which a viewer might feel, literally, at home.

This is a house for the body: a piece should be inhabitable, used by people the way they use other things in their everyday life (a piece should be something like architecture, a piece should be something like furniture).

This is a house in the mind: the forms and images that make up a piece should be the conventions that everyone, in a particular culture, already knows as a matter of habit (a piece should be something like a poster, something like a billboard).

But these conventions, that are the building-blocks of a piece, are the building-blocks of a culture: these conventions are power-signs, that confirm and maintain a dominant class/race/gender.

A piece, then, should take these conventions and subvert them. Take this literally: revise the first sentence — the prototype piece is a house turned upside-down.

If the house makes you cozy, if you can snuggle into it, then you're lost in the past and stabilization; but, if the house makes you itch, if you do a double-take, then you snap out of the present, you can have time to think of the future and change.

This should be the kind of home that makes you a stranger inside it. This should be the kind of home that takes you out of the body, so that person-in-house-in-country can be analyzed from the outside.

#### I. Furniture (Living-Room, Bedroom)

Furniture is midway between clothing and architecture. The way the skin covers the bones, clothing contains

the body: a chair, then, contains the body-contained-by-clothing — a room, then, contains the body-contained-by-clothing-contained-by-chair.

Furniture is one move out of privacy, one small step toward going public. You can, after all, hold something in your hands; but, as long as you do, your hands are tied, your hands aren't free to touch and grab hold of anything else. So you put the thing away, in a box, in a drawer. Once you walk away from the chest of drawers, your possession is out of your hands, out of sight and up for grabs. The closed door, the pulled-in drawer, provokes other people's desire.

As long as something is inside the cupboard, it's safe, preserved from the rest of the world. As long as something is preserved from the world, it's dead, apart from the life of the world. (Or else it grows in the dark, inside its own world, it festers in isolation.) Once you sit in a chair, you have to get up sooner or later, or else you'll sink further and further in, you'll lie down and die.

The chair has been shaped to fit the body. When you get up out of the chair, the chair retains human shape: the chair stands on its own four legs, the chair keeps its back up. Now that man has made its match, it has a life of its own.

As long as furniture is mass-produced, it can be cheap; a robot for everybody's house. But, as long as furniture is one-of-a-kind, it's in the realm of the art-market: its place of being is in the home of the rich — the chair becomes a monster — it maintains a class system.

#### II. Public Furniture (The Hall & the Courtyard)

The space of a building is limited. But the number of people who might want to enter that space is, potentially, limitless. The building is always subject to explosion: once the building puts its guard down (or once people put the guard down by force), the building can burst with people.

The wall and the floor are surfaces to look at and be on, but they are also spaces to be inside of; they are supports, but also containers. There's space under the floor, between stories; there's space inside the wall, between rooms.

If people use these spaces in-between, then people function as the bloodstream of a building.

Once people are considered as a stream, once people are crowded together, they're too close to each other to see one another clearly: there's no distance from which one person can see another person's whole body, the bodies are blurred together, the non-seeing person has to resort to other senses. Once bodies can't be seen, they can't be separated (not until a person is re-taught, and learns to use other senses as a distinguishing instrument). Once bodies can't be separated, they can't be judged. Once bodies can't be judged, there's no basis for choice, no standard of fidelity, no reason not to be promiscuous.

The intrusion of crowds into a building (from outside, where they are dispersed into open space) is like the return of house-dwellers/apartment-dwellers from the suburbs back to the city: now that people are no longer kept apart, now that people are massed together again at the center, they can meet and talk, as if at a town-square, they can conspire.

When people talk with people they already know, their talk is programmed, organized by their mutual history. When people talk with people they don't know, they talk promiscuously: they feel ideas out as they feel each other up.

### III. Public Space (the Street & the Park)

Public art has to remember where it came from. The background of public art is the monument; this can be exemplified in the kind of monument everyone knows, the statue of a general on a horse in the park. The memory of public art is the tradition of domination:

the monument is bigger than a person, and stands on a pedestal above the level of people.

When it tries to escape its role as monument, public art has to beware: if it resembles a house, or furniture, it approximates architecture, it disappears into the category of architecture. In order, then, to maintain its status as public art, it can keep the figure that embodies a monument. But the figure might be built so that it can be entered, the figure might be sat in (like road-side architecture, the architecture that is taken seriously only as a kind of pet of architecture, like the hot-dog stand in the shape of a hot-dog). The monument is brought down to size; the monument is brought down to earth.

If the monument is literally brought down to earth, and made horizontal, it makes a point of opposing the vertical: it declares itself as the enemy of a dominant male culture.

But, once public art lies low, on the ground, it can spread from beneath, like ooze, like *The Blob*. Public art becomes a monster. How to deter the invasion of public art?

Public art, after all, wants to be permanent. It can't just come and go, or else it's a performance, it's a demonstration. It needs to exist the way a city street exists: this is something we can come back to, years later. But, if public art is made of bronze, or stone, it announces itself as art, it falls into the category of art as we know it, as we've studied it. And, if public art is made of steel, it shares the world of factory, industry, business: this is the world of the corporation, not the person.

As an alternative, public art can be made of materials that people are used to, materials that most people have already taken into their own hands: ordinary house-building materials, furniture-making materials. Public art might be meant to last only so long as an ordinary house lasts.



If public art has inherent in it a built-in obsolescence, it can always be restored — with the understanding that it will be restored with the materials and methods of a future time. Public art anticipates its own history, it envisions its own revolution against it. The street is changed when we come back to it.

On the street, public art might be something you almost don't notice, like a street light, like a fire hydrant. Later, after you've passed it by, you might have a vague remembrance of something, though you can't pinpoint where the memory came from, like a song that you can't get out of your hand.

#### Addenda I: Prints

Sculpture (architecture, furniture) is an embodiment of floor: painting (drawings, prints, posters, billboards, movies) is an embodiment of wall. Floor is what you stand in the middle of; this is a place to experience. Wall is what you stand in front of; this is an object to analyze.

But, if you look down on it from above, the floor is an object to survey, like the wall, map-like, as if from afar. And, if you come upon it suddenly, the wall is a place that stops you dead in your tracks, you're in the middle of things, as you are in the case of the floor, the wall looms up in front of you, you're banging your head against the wall.

The plan-view puts the viewer in the position of an angel, the plan-view takes the viewer out of his or her body so that he or she can look down upon it: the elevation leaves the viewer in the position of a person, as he or she knows himself or herself to be, face-to-face with a doorway, or cowering under an arch or in front of a column.

A print can be considered pre-work. A print is a place where I can try out an image, feel that image out, on the wall in front of me, before I ever began to think I would turn that image, or something like it, into

sculpture/furniture/architecture. "Print" is taken literally: the print imprints an image, forms a type: I can stand facing, baldly and boldly, a category concretized — "print" is taken literally, a category/type/image is imprinted onto my brain. (Later, I can let that image go, let it get lost in space and covered with people.)

A print can be considered post-work. A print is a place where I can sum up an image, on the wall, after using it, or something like it, in sculpture/furniture/architecture. This summation might be a prelude to a re-use, a re-living, of the image: it takes the image out of the real world and pins it up on the wall, as if in a laboratory, cleaning up the loose ends, before the image is sent back out into the real world, this time in a new direction. Or the summation, on the wall, might be an act of resignation, or smugness, or a craving for security: the image, once it is isolated and clarified, on the wall, like a trophy, can be fallen back on, like a trademark, like propaganda.

#### Addenda 2: Back-ground and inside thoughts

##### A. The influence of film

The dominant mode of seeing, in the 19th century, was railway travel: the landscape seen out of a train window — the landscape framed and packaged by the train window — the landscape grasped and owned as the viewer moves, advances, progresses, through it. In the 20th century, the terms are reversed, the viewer no longer has to move: the landscape, by means of film, moves past the viewer — the viewer becomes, literally, an armchair traveler. The prototype viewer, in the 19th century, was the passenger; the prototype viewer, in the 20th century, is the dreamer, the sleeper. The viewer, walking through experiential space (sculptural space, architectural space) does so with movies on his or her mind; the viewer might be considered a sleep-walker.

A sculptural/architectural place is a collision of space and bodies. Consider film as a billboard, an announcement, for this place. There are two kinds of film, and therefore two kinds of billboards: the film of all-space — the science-fiction film, which journeys beyond the civilized city into the frontier); and the film of no-space and all-body — the gangster-flick, which murders and therefore stills the body (the successors of the gangster-flick are the horror film, with the vampire whose body will not die, and the porno movie, where body is piled up on body, filling the screen with an orgy of bodies). The film of all-space dissolves into light, and is all white; the film of all-body lets no light in, and fades to black. Since the fact of film is the fact of change (the screen changes from one place to another, from one person to another), the ultimate film is the catastrophe film, the disaster film (the scene keeps changing until there are no more scenes, no more places, no more people). This ultimate is the “pure idea” that the act of building (sculpture/furniture/architecture) starts from, or that the act of building (sculpture/furniture/architecture) heads toward a goal. (Or the act of building might be a way of warding off the horror of the “pure idea”.)

#### B. The grounding in Americanism

American building is an act of making-do. This act is additive and concrete (the prototype is the log-cabin, where notched log is fitted to notched log so that there's no abstraction, no extra frame-work needed to hold up the walls). American building is desperate and insistent, in the middle of nowhere: the figure of Buster Keaton dressed in black, running alone against a white sky — the building of church and courthouse at the edge of the frontier, in John Ford's *My Darling Clementine*. Once the house is built, the child has to — sooner or later — leave the home. Sex means living the home, leaving the family. But the American wants to be inside

and outside the home at the same time: the Melville/Hawthorne/Faulkner protagonist has a nostalgia for incest. Incest is sex without having to leave the home, incest is purity: this is sex unspoiled by others, sex with the other as a mirror-image of the self. Running away from forbidden incest, the American protagonist chooses an alternative purity: abstraction — the whiteness of Moby Dick. The body has desires that the mind can't admit to; so the body has to disintegrate — the American body is lost at sea. Public art is a meeting-place for community: the community is an extended family: public art is a place where the family can get too close: the image/sign/propaganda of public art is an abstraction that impels a participant to social/cultural/political action, away from the snugness/smugness of self/family/sex.

Call me Ishmael, call me Vito Acconci. My obsession with Americanism comes, perhaps, from my having a very un-American name: I have to prove myself an American...

#### C. The undercurrent of humor

In the tragic view of life, the protagonist is channeled, along a pathway, toward a goal (call this goal God, or Fate, or Transcendence). The viewer — behind the protagonist, on the protagonist's back, seeing the world from the protagonist's viewpoint — is numbed into belief, numbed into the protagonist's channeled vision. In the comic view of life, the same protagonist travels the same path — but, somewhere along the way, the protagonist slips on a banana peel. Suddenly the protagonist falls to the wayside; suddenly the viewer is jolted off the protagonist's back, freed from the protagonist's point of view: the viewer has time off, the viewer has time to think (maybe the goal wasn't so important after all) — the viewer, as an unbeliever now, can re-consider and analyze the situation from outside.

*SOME NOTES ON AND AROUND FOUR-STORY-TABLE, 1984*

1  
The place is, possibly, nothing more than furniture.

2  
Sculpture should be thought of, possibly, as nothing more than furniture.

3  
Or more precisely: the traditional sculpture base is the furniture that holds the sculpture (the figure, the statue).

4  
Furniture, then, holds a person the way the sculpture base would hold that person if he/she were immortalized.

5  
Furniture is the past of sculpture; furniture is earth while sculpture is heaven.

6  
Once heaven is in mind, as the future, furniture'd better start thinking of life on earth, of making a world.

7  
The world, as everybody knows, contains the ground and the sky. Furniture, in order to make a world, might be a miniature park. Some people choose to sit where others can sit at their feet. When you sleep, you're closer to death and, theoretically, closer to heaven.

8  
Since sculpture implies immortality and heaven, all sculpture (figure, statue) should be as if asleep: all sculpture should be horizontal.

9  
Sculpture has no need to be vertical. Rather than aspire to heaven, sculpture is already there, as long as it clings to the earth — or, better, if only it goes under the earth (the house of the dead).

10  
Furniture is one step out of the ground, one step up from the dead.

11  
Furniture, then, is addition (it's added on to the ground). A basic method of furniture-making is addition (one part tacked on to another part, one part slapped up against another part). This "slapping-on" technique combines the parts, but doesn't absorb the parts into the whole. No step is lost; each step reveals itself as an assertion, an act of will. The whole can be taken apart, the world can fall apart (or the world can be pulled apart whenever necessary).

12  
Back to the piece: chair supports table, which has to have a chair in front of it, a chair which can then support a higher table, etc. In order to break the chain of connection (chair of command), the table supported by the highest chair has to be turned into a bed (the table as bed doesn't need a chair in front of it: you wouldn't want someone to eat you while you were asleep).

13  
Some sleep; others sit up all night. (And then there are those who confuse the issue by walking in their sleep.)

1. The escape from art

The person who chooses to do public art might be considered a refugee, in flight from the gallery/museum which has been established as the proper occasion for art in our culture at this time. Escape from the confines of that space means losing the privileges of its laboratory condition: the privilege, for example, of specialization either in the form of art (art considered as a system of universals) or in the context of art (art considered as a system of commodities). Abdicating from the accustomed space of art, the public artist declares himself/herself uninterested in art questions, and no longer involved in the development of art as we've known it, in our culture, at this time. Public art revises the present of art and conjectures as to its future: a time when art might be considered not as a separable category, in its own arena and with its own products, but as an atmosphere instilled, almost secretly, within other categories of life.

2. Life on the edge: marginality as the center of public art

Inside the gallery/museum, the artist functions as the center of a particular system; once outside that system, the artist is lost between worlds — the artist's position, in our culture, is marginal. The public artist can turn that marginality to his/her advantage. The public artist is forced, physically, off to the side; the public artist is asked to deal not with the building but with the sidewalk, not with the road but with the benches at the side of the road, not with the city but with the sidewalk, not with the city but with the bridges from city to city. Outside and in between centers, the public artist is under cover; public art functions, literally, as a marginal note: it can comment on, and contradict, the main body of the text of a culture.

3. The innocent bystander and the anxiety of choice

When a person enters a gallery/museum, that person announces himself/herself as an art-viewer; the art-viewer submits to the terms of the art arena, the art-viewer agrees to be a victim. Outside the gallery/museum, in a public place, there is no art-viewer; there are only passers-by, with different histories and varying biases. These people haven't asked for art; when they come across a public art-work, they see it not as "art" but simply as something else in their world, something that hadn't been there before. Public art, in order to exist in the world, agrees to certain social conventions, certain rules of peaceful privilege of imposition. Using manners as a cover, public art can lie low; instead of attacking, public art insinuates. The objects of public art are not things in themselves but only an excuse for time — time for people to look around, grope around, and find things out for themselves.

4. A geometry of conventions

The words "public art" should be taken literally: on the one hand, a piece is public in that it's usable, inhabitable — on the other hand, a piece is public in that its forms and images are conventions (like a house-form, like an advertising image) that everyone, in a particular culture, knows as a matter of habit. When a convention is used by an artist/architect/designer, it can no longer be used vernacularly; the conscious use of the convention rarefies it into a distinct, regular, and easily recognizable shape or volume. Like a Platonic solid, the convention can be subjected now to a set of mental operations: be rotated, as if on a grid — two conventions can collide with and interpenetrate another... These operations, by isolating a convention, exhibit that convention as an icon that can't be further broken down, can't be analyzed. The operation

of one convention with and against another subverts the power that each convention is a sign of.

#### 5. Public art and the public welfare

When an artist enters public space, he/she enters politics. Public art, mixing in with the other things of the world, either confirms or subverts that world, and the power structure that organizes it. Whereas politics, in order to maintain itself as a system, is forced to sustain a single key, art-as-politics is free to take different sides at the same time. This capacity of multiple viewpoints explodes a monolithic organization of power. The public artist falls into a double-bind situation: subverting a dominant culture at the same time keeps that culture an open system — it allows that culture to revivify and keep itself going. A more efficient subversion, then, might lie in confirming and re-confirming the elements of a culture, so that the culture has no breathing room and will slowly die off. But this method of subversion demands patience, cynicism, and a blind trust in evolution.

#### 6. Rip up the posters, dismantle the billboards

The appropriate medium of political messages is assumed to be the poster. Its appropriateness lies in its two-dimensionality: the edges of the paper separate the message within from all other messages, so that it can be focused on — the edges of the paper function as a framing device that signals a summarization that can then be analyzed by a viewer/reader — analysis of the poster leads to action, away from the poster and out into the world-at-large. But the two-dimensionality of the poster, at the same time, leaves the poster in front of the eyes, and distant from the body of the person reading it. The poster confirms a mind-body separation: the mind might be influenced by the poster and might then impel the body to action, but all the while the body is in a world of its own, out of the

poster's reach — the body keeps its own habits — at any moment the body might rebel. The real political message is not in the poster but in the wall that supports the poster, in the ground that supports the person who reads the poster. It is this wall and this floor that is the proper arena for a radical public art.

#### 7. Building as nostalgia/nostalgia as resistance

The built environment, in an electronic age, is a throwback to an industrial era. In an age when quantities of places can be stored on a disc, the built environment occupies too much space; it takes too much time to walk through the built environment, in an age when distant places can be brought home on television. Public art, as a gathering place for people, functions as a model of the city; but the city loses its importance when any person, wherever that person might be, can gather all the information of the city on a computer terminal. By reinstating a model from another time, public art makes apparent the contradictions of a current time. The electronic age, while supposedly eliminating boundaries, enforces the image of a person alone at a computer — it enforces images of single units and separation. The electronic age makes for an easy escape from the mixed crowds of the city; instead of having to go *outside*, to the suburbs, a person only has to go *within*, in between headphones and inside an automobile capsule. This resort to privacy is a withdrawal from the peopled places that lead to discussions that lead to arguments that lead to reconsiderations that lead potentially to a revolution. In a world of shopping malls, public art reinserts the town square.

#### 8. The two traditions of public art

The older tradition is that of the monument; the newer tradition, which is fast becoming the contemporary standard, is street-and-park furniture. The monument



asserts itself too much; it stands apart from its environment and over the heads of people; its message is — the individual is important, but some individuals are more important than others. Street-and-park furniture, on the other hand, recedes too far into its environment, and plays up to the habits of people; its message is — be programmed, be comfortable, there's no reason to change. Each tradition has to be resisted on its own terms. 1) Bring the monument down to earth, where it can be entered and be overrun by people (this makes the vertical horizontal, and lays low the dominant male principle). 2) Instead of providing furniture, build something that people, using their own ingenuity, might happen to make use of as something like furniture (rather than people at the mercy of furniture, this is furniture at the mercy of people).

#### 9. Two models for public art: the curb and the spaceship

The curb, or the lamppost, or the fire hydrant, goes almost unnoticed; it's as if it's always been there. This kind of public art blends in with its surroundings, and can criticize from within. The spaceship lands in an alien place; it revels in its look as if it came out of nowhere, it makes no attempt at camouflage to fit its surroundings. This kind of public art can criticize from the outside, like a future-studies scenario. (The contemporary version of the spaceship is the park, which is set up as an oasis inside the city, separate from the city. The park substitutes greenery from a past time for the spaceship's white of the future.)

#### 10. Being there: thinking from the inside out

Being in the world means being encased in the world. Our habit of thinking is: in order to analyze the world you have to step outside the world, jump out of the world. This habit of thinking, and of talking, allows the construction of a self to exist (you "go out of your

self", you "take your self out of it"). The implication is that, as long as you're inside the world, you're too close to the world to think about it; you can't experience and analyze at the same time. But, no matter how far you go, mentally, out of the world, you're still physically inside it. Taking yourself out of the world, mentally, means only a retreat from material conditions, on the one hand, and from people, on the other. The implication is that you can think only when you're alone, only when you withdraw into a meditation chamber. One function of public art is to re-imbed a person inside material conditions and within the company of other people; one function of public art is to learn, and teach, a simultaneity of experience and analysis; one function of public art is to undo the construction of a self.

1

The beginning of John Ford's *The Searchers*: after title and credits on brick, there's a black ground for white text: "Texas 1868" — the text fades out, the screen is black for another instant until, suddenly, there's a cut inside the black ground, the black ground begins to open from the inside, a vertical rectangle in the middle of the horizontal screen, a landscape seen through the rectangle — moving into the opening, a woman stands with her back to the camera, her back to us — she's at a doorway, the opening in the black was the opening of a door, the black is the inside of the house, which is dark except for the light of the landscape in the doorway, through which we watch John Wayne approaching on horseback — we're behind the woman, we're the males on her back, we'll know her secrets, we're in the dark of a private house, a dark that stretches to become the vast dark of a public house that tries to be both public and private at once by keeping the darkness of privacy, we're in the darkness of a movie theater.

Go through the plot quickly: while the outsider/guardian John Wayne is called away, the house is attacked, the parents are killed, the daughters are kidnapped — Wayne goes out to bring them back. Two hours later, years later, after the search is over and the movie is about to end, we're in front of the same black ground, the same hole into the landscape. It's a different house, but no matter: the inside is just as black, the comforts of one home are replaceable with the comforts of another. The family comes back in: first the lost girl who has lived with Indians/aliens, she comes in with the people who will be her new parents now that she's white again — John Wayne, then, is about to come in, but he steps out of the way to allow a newly-formed couple to enter (this is a necessary couple, because the male member is a half-breed, who has to be integrated) — they've all come

in now but Wayne, he is alone, the others have forgotten about him, he puts one foot on the threshold but he can't come in, he turns around and goes back out, the door closes, the screen is black, the movie is over.

One second thought as we're leaving the theater: when the family streamed in, they didn't come directly toward us, they came in askew, to our right, they disappeared off-screen not into us but off to our side. So we're not them; we're in the house but outside it, able to see it at the same time — though we might be family, we have the mobility of a John Wayne, we have a choice of either role. (After all, the inside of the house is dark, so dark: if we choose to have its comforts, we have to take the abyss along with it.)

2

The American (male) myth demands the building of the home; but it demands also the outsider who comes and goes as he pleases, who can't go home again. The American male is divided into two parts, both seen in terms of the function of building. One part, one role, is that of the husband/father who, as a by-product, builds a house for self and family; this act of building comes out of his essence, out of his name, this is an act of building-from-within. Once the house is built, the husband/father can take it for granted and turn his attention to the people inside. For that house to be preserved, then, or for that house once it is destroyed to be rebuilt, requires an act of building from outside, an act that comes not from necessity and fact but out of will and abstraction. The other American male role, then, is that of the architect: his desire is not to build a house for himself and his own but, instead, to build *any* house, to build *all* houses. In so doing, the American architect subverts the role of the American husband/father, who is seen as a sissy, a stay-at-home. The American architect's mission is to build a home for

others, a home for women, a prison for women. Once the woman is brought home, the American architect part of the male is allowed to go back out and hunt for more and put them in place, the places that he will build. The American architect part of the male is allowed to go out and be, at one time in history, a pioneer and, at another time, a swinging single.

3

Sooner or later the child has to leave the home. The way to leave that home is through sex: sex means leaving the home, leaving the family. But, whereas the European home is embedded in the ground, embedded in the past, the American home is built on top of the ground, a house without a basement, a house without a history of its own, a house that can only put on the faces of different styles imported from the lands of various ancestors. The American house has a tenuous existence; the American fear is: if you leave the house, the house might disappear into thin air. So the American is in a double-bind: in order to save the house, the American has to stay at home — but, in order to save the self, in order to grow up, the American has to leave home. The resolution of this contradiction is incest; incest is sex without having to leave the home. The American vision of incest (Melville, Faulkner) is restricted to brother-sister; mother-son sex, or father-daughter sex, would be pinning the male down so that he can never get up again. Mother-son and father-daughter sex would satisfy the need to maintain the home by staying at home; but it would deny the male-myth need to be outside. Brother-sister sex, on the other hand, keeps the show on the road: it allows the children to leave the home as they have to, in order to grow up, while all the while carrying their own home with them (in the form of each other) as they go. Brother-sister sex is the prototype of the American mobile home.

One note of warning. Brother-sister sex, while granting theoretically mobility to both parties, is a fantasy or a privilege restricted to males since, in the end, it restricts the female: though the sister, by choosing the brother, is in the act of rebelling against the father, who she has rejected in favor of the brother, sooner or later she will probably see that brother as the spitting-image of the father, so she's been subjugated to that father all along. If the woman stays at home as daughter, inside the fixed home, she's stuck; if she moves away as sister, inside the mobile home, she's carried.

4

Let me tell you a story; more precisely, let me tell you about a dream, a dream from sometime in the mid-70s. There's a large set of steps, stone steps, so long you can't see the ends of them, steps of grandeur, steps as if up to a palace, the steps of a C. B. DeMille movie. The dream is shot in long-shot, but at the same time as I'm seeing the scene from afar I'm shoved right into the middle of it, I'm climbing up the steps. I'm struggling up the steps: at each step there's a small band of toy soldiers fighting to stop me, to keep me down — they're tiny toy soldiers (this is how I see it in long-shot), but each of them has the strength of ten men (this is how I feel it in close-up). Okay; they're strong; but I'm winning anyway, at each step I make my way through them, I push the soldiers away and climb higher. When I push each soldier off me, the soldier falls — now in side-elevation, the toy soldier (small and barely visible in relation to the steps) falls in a slow graceful arc (the arc is visible) off the steps, the arc has the sound of wind inside a room. Finally, exhausted, I reach the top. The top is an empty plain, the vast ground is gray and concrete-like but probably natural, the sky is white. Standing on the empty ground are three black and white photographs, aged

photographs, hinged together, like pictures on top of a grandmother's fireplace but as large as a person, as large as me. Pictures of people larger than me, since they show only torso and face: a photo of Marx, a photo of Darwin, a photo of Wagner. The eyes of one of them (I can't remember which) turn to the others, like the eyes of a statue in a Cocteau movie, and that one says: "Isn't it absurd of Vito Acconci to spend all that time avoiding the House of Torment only to arrive here at the House of Torture?"

5

A first-person narrative begins at home, comes out of the home. The reader, in the closure provided by the light that allows him/her to read (light/person/book forms a cocoon), either puts himself/herself in the first-person narrator's place (inside that narrator's house), or comes face-to-face with that narrator (as if part of a couple, as if in a marriage). A third-person narrator, on the other hand, allows the reader to travel: the reader views the persons and events in the narrative from afar, the reader skims over things without having to be embedded in them. The mystery novel is the exemplar of the first-person narrative: the talking detective talks himself (herself? usually not) into existence, goes on talking so that metaphor makes a place to put the self in, talks in circles so that a plot might thicken. The mystery novel never leaves home, goes down into the basement and finds the skeletons in the closet; the mystery novel goes from the present into the past. The science-fiction novel, on the other hand, is the exemplar of the third-person narrative: the narrator doesn't have a home, the narrator is only a visitor of foreign (alien) places — places, things, and persons are seen at a distance as objects to be examined and studied. This laboratory-like observation allows for the free-play of re-mixture and re-organization; committed to no home and no

family and no love, the third-person narrator goes from the present into the future.

6

Before I did work in an art context, I was writing poetry. My first pieces, in an art-context, were activities in the street: this excursion into the street could be seen as an attempt to leave home, a home shaped by the contact of writing-person and desk-top, through means of paper and pen and defined by the boundaries of light. The sheet of paper, looked down at on the desk, was analogous to the plan-view of a house; going out into the street was a way of literally breaking the margins, breaking out of the house and leaving the paper behind. After a few months of doing street pieces, however, I started doing pieces with my own body: I concentrated on myself, I worked on my own person. It was as if I had left home too quickly, as if I was afraid I would be lost out in the streets: I had to come back home — whatever work I would do in an art-context had to begin with what I could assume I knew at least something about (had to begin with my own body, had to begin at home).

7.

My generation of artists re-instituted an age of promiscuity: we used whatever materials were conveniently available, we switched media at will, we worked on the spot in different and specific sites. The re-emergence of painting, after the mid-70s, represented and confirmed a return to monogamy. Painting was a last gasp of the self, a last-ditch attempt to believe in the existence of the self, a self that then could commit itself to things (consistent materials) and other selves (persons who would take the time to stand in front of a painting, the time to mentally go through the painting). Painting was a way to connect yourself with what you were doing

(inevitably, the person who painted would get some paint on himself/herself as he/she painted — it was like the sperm that consummated a marriage contract); once you and yours were connected you were out of the reach of others — once the painting was hung in a gallery or museum, it couldn't be touched. What painting did for the rest of us, who didn't paint, was to provide a scare, or at least a reminder, a reminder analogous to Pascal's wager: we might not believe that the self existed, but what if it did? — if it did we had a lot to lose, we'd lose the self we didn't even know we had — so we might as well act as if we believed that the self existed — in order to prove, to ourselves and to others, that we believed, we would make ourselves faithful to something or someone.

8

The home is made up of talk; the foundation and maintenance of the home depends on a group of people each of whom believes in a self that is expressed by voice and that can be combined and re-combined with other selves. The home survives on a mixture of voices, each of which can be heard and responded to by other people in the home who, once they hear, know they are not alone in the house. The people in a house drive themselves into a corner that they can call home. Family talk can't be allowed out of the house; if a voice is thrown, outside the walls, the family becomes confused, it no longer knows where it is, the home opens out into the street and becomes confused with the street. Considered from the outside, then, the house that remains a home keeps silent. If an outsider hears a voice from inside the house, the home is made all too familiar, all too human, the outsider who overhears recognizes the owner of the voice as one of his/her own kind, the outsider feels at home and has a way in, the barriers of the home are broken. Considered from the outside, the house that remains a home

should only be seen and not heard, should only be seen and therefore desired. Whereas the house talks within, it writes without: the house puts a sign up outside to show off its public image. This writing is public and can be shared with outsiders as much as the talk inside is private and can't be. But the house as writing presents itself as a page, a wall, a flat plane that acts as armor; talk, on the other hand, would have had no boundaries, talk would have come from within each speaker, leading the outsider inside the body of each member of the home — once the house talks, it's opened inside-out.

9

Some recent public places, sometimes called "art", look like houses; but they don't have all the functional parts of a house (plumbing, etc.) or, if they do, they might have the appearance of private houses while being publicly owned and available for public use. These are houses meant not so much to live in as to pass through. Some of us who make these places choose the house as a prototype because it ties in with people's common knowledge and ordinary usage; since the house can be assumed as a place to be in, and not be met with resistance as "art", it can be used, as a matter of course, as an occasion of social interaction and cultural reconsideration. This dependence on the form of the house, however, might betray, on the part of the art-doer, a withdrawal to privacy in the middle of what's meant to be a public realm. The art-doer's construction of a house reveals a desire to domesticate the environment: the world will be filled with tiny houses, even when those houses aren't needed to live in — the implication is that the public realm is too large to put your finger on, the flaws in a social/economic/political system are out of the control of people, the only thing to do is to give up and go back home. What might be seen as a retreat,



on the other hand, might actually be a re-attack, through a collision of conventions. Our insistence of the form of the house might be a way to insert, inside the public realm (the world of court-house and town-square, a world that has been considered by convention to belong to the male) — to insert within that male domain a region that has been considered by convention to be female (think of the wife/mother in Joe Dante's *Gremlins* who attacks the little monster while shouting, "Get out of my kitchen!"). The sprouting of tiny multi-use houses all over public space is the introduction of intimate distance into a world where only public and social distances usually apply; this emergence of houses (make-believe houses, half-houses, substitute houses) is like fucking in the streets, like an orgy in the middle of a town-meeting. Inside the house are corridors and basements, places where secrets can fester and bombs are planted.

10

You read the book before going to sleep, then you turn out the light; the lights go out — we're in a different room now, not a bedroom but a theater — and the movie begins. The book, enclosed within its covers, is like a house; the reader can open the book, open the house into rooms, but can only look on those rooms from the outside, as if looking down at a model. The movie is on the wall, is like the wall of a house that, in turn, shows the projection of a landscape, the viewer can't get through the wall, can only stand outside and look, as if the wall is a picture-window — the viewer can't travel through the landscape, can only look at it off in the distance, as if looking at a billboard. The book is written in a language that everybody knows, everybody shares, but the book can be read only by one person at a time. The movie theater is a public place, but the place is dark, the dark a person is in while asleep, the viewer sleeps in

public. The book is, physically, smaller than life, the movie is too large for life. The book and the movie provide a theory, a scenario, and an image of public action; but the closure of the book within its covers, the confinement of the movie to the wall, the privacy of the movie-viewing and the book-reading experiences — all this contradicts public action, stops public action before it can begin, puts public action off to an unspecified future. Public art, architecture, public action, feed off the influence of books and movies; but as long as you can't put the book down, as long as you see the movie again and again, the book and the movie function as surrogates, making behavior in public unnecessary. Only when the book is closed, only when the movie is over, can public-art/architecture/public-action begin. The goal of public-art/architecture/public-action might be: to obviate the need for books and movies, to include what used to be the experience of books and movies within the experience of public space, to nurture beings who live out books and movies of their own, on their own, and with each other.

1

"Land ho!": the sailor's cry of discovery, from high up on the mast, as the ship approaches its goal after a life at sea. This is the beginning of the word "landscape". In order for discovery to be possible, land has to be considered first as far away; land has to be far off so that it can be seen all at once, as a panorama. Land recedes and becomes "landscape". "Landscape" equals "landescape"; the land escapes, out of your reach: the word "landscape" pulls the land away, or pushes you back away from the land — that land now, unused and unusable by you, is free to expand out in front of you. Once the land is in front of you, it isn't land anymore, it isn't ground: the land becomes landscape, the ground becomes a wall, the wall becomes a picture. The word "landscape" is subsumed into the phrase "landscape painting": "landscape" is not just a *view* of land, it's a *picture* of land, a picture that comes with its own history and its own conventions of pictorial representation. As a picture, "landscape" is not only seen but also *made*, constructed, produced. "Landscape", then, comes with an aura of untouchability; it has double safeguards: first, in order to be viewed, it has to be kept at a distance — second, since it is produced and therefore owned and exchangeable, it has to be protected.

2

"Landfall": (def.) a sighting of land when at sea, the first sight of land after a voyage. The word "landfall" implies that, when land is come upon for the first time, it's the land that comes upon you; "landfall" is like a rainfall, a snowfall — the land comes down the way snow and rain come down. For the land to come down, it has to first rise up. As the ship approaches the shore, the shore bulges; the shore swells up, like a whale, over the ship — the land engulfs the ship and the sea. The word "landscape" guards against the word

"landfall". So that the land doesn't come up like thunder, it's kept in place and at a distance.

"Landscape" is land made passive, and subjected to operations. If land is wild and free, then "landscape" is tame. Or, inversely: if land is expensive to buy and to own, then "landscape" is free — but it's free because it's only an image, you can't get your hands on it. "Landscape" is domesticated land; "landscape" frames the land, and then the framed picture is kept in the mind and put into the home (where the landscape is dreamt about, in bed, or desired, on the wall or on a television screen).

3

When land is turned into a picture of land, you don't have to go there, you can just stand back and look. The implication of landscape might be: you're not *supposed* to be there. Whatever land you happen to be on, there's always land you can never reach, there's always land that's only a picture. Wherever you are, there's always somewhere else; the notion of landscape lives so that desire never dies. Once there is "landscape", there is future, or hope, or universe, or God. Distance is the distribution of power. On the one hand, land far away retains its power, since you can't get to it; on the other hand, land far away is in your power, since it can't get to you, it can't take you over, you can keep it at a safe distance. As "landscape", land recedes into the distance; landscape is land in perspective — you're the viewer, it's your perspective, the land is yours, you're the landlord.

4

Land-scape/Land-scope. As "landscape", land is subjected to instruments for observation — a telescope, a microscope, a radarscope. Land is abstracted and turned into a network of landmarks. "Landscape" is a fabrication of land: not a building *on* land but a

building of land, a building in the mind. The land functions only as the support for "landscape", whose building matter is numbers and signs and logic systems; landscape is the architecture not of land but of air — landscape is land reduced to an idea. In the middle of landscape, you walk on the land with your head in the clouds; you're on land at the same time you're off it. Either "landscape" speaks *about* the land (with "landscape" you apply language to the land, you analyze the land); or "landscape" speaks *for* the land, and makes the land speak (with "landscape" you turn the land into language, into figures of speech, into metaphors for and metonymies of other lands).

5

When the first encounter with land is from afar, either by seeing or thinking, then later — when you're in it, when you're on the land and can touch it — you have a nostalgia for the way it was before, when you first encountered it: you want to make it go away and be far again, distant enough so that its rough edges are cleaned up. "Landscape" is the elimination of the "other" — the superfluous, the unaccountable — so that the land can stretch again as far as the eye can see, so that the land can fit into the mind's eye, as if through the eye of a needle. "Landscape" pampers the mind and the eye, and neglects the body. The means to "landscape" is either cultivation or war; one way or the other, the land is purified — either weeds are removed, or bodies.

6

The logical end of "landscape" is the end of landscape, the blank landscape, the landscape all white or all black; either all the details have been removed, or all possible details have been combined, all lands have been amalgamated. The person standing in front of this landscape has nothing to point to, or too much to

point to all at once. Since pointing allows a person to point to "there" while remaining "here", the absence of the goal of pointing confuses "here" and "there": the pointer is drawn into the act of pointing, the person is swallowed up into the projection and disappears into the perspective and into the future.

7

I hold myself back, I keep myself from being projected into the end of landscape by clinging to language; I turn landscape into language and define two kinds of landscape: the landscape that exists by itself and the landscape that exists with others.

The landscape that exists *by* itself exists *for* itself: the park and the garden, for example, exist either in the middle of nowhere or as an enclave in the middle of the city — pathways lead to the park/garden but, once you're inside it, the park/garden provides its own system of pathways, its own pathways take over and proliferate upon themselves within it, the park/garden entwines within itself. As language, this landscape is a self-embedded construction: the sentence whose clauses are placed within, between subject and predicate. The sentence is slowed down by its embedded construction — instead of continuing doggedly toward its end, the sentence harks back to its beginning, or spins off in another unsuspected direction, before re-directing itself toward its final punctuation, its period; the park/garden, too, is slowed down by its embedded construction — the winding pathways, in greater or lesser degree like a labyrinth, slow down movement and keep people inside a realm of withdrawal or respite.

The landscape that exists *with* others exists *for* others; the *plaza* and the courtyard, for example, function at the service of the buildings around them, while the street functions at the service of the city: the *plaza* and the courtyard are extensions of the building to the

outside — the street traverses the city like a corridor, or a railroad, that leads to or stops at each building in turn. As language, this landscape is an additive construction: the sentence whose prepositional phrases and subordinate clauses and parentheses are tagged on at the end, after the verb, extending the sentence. The additive construction keeps the sentence going, transforming the period into only a comma, only a temporary rest — the sentence refuses to stop, either repeating itself endlessly or accumulating non-sequiturs, like a shaggy-dog story; in the same way, the additive construction of the *plaza/courtyard* brings trees into the atrium of the building, and the street keeps going for yet another block.

8

With “landscape” on my mind, I set my body onto the land. When I “take a stroll through the park”, I set myself on to the park, on top of the grounds of the park; when I “take to the street”, I take the street, the street becomes taken by me. The land becomes passive; it’s been pre-treated by notions of “landscape” — once “landscape” provides a ground to see, to survey, that ground is there to make use of. “Landscape” prepares the land to be exploited, to be raped.

9

“Landscape” is an attempt to keep land in place, to keep land in one piece, lest it be fragmented and blown to bits by “land mines” — (def.) cavities in the earth that contain explosive charges, just below ground surface, and that are designed to go off from the weight of persons passing over them. On a “landscape”, you’re in the world of science-fiction: passing over the earth in a space-ship, you have a vantage point from which to explore the earth, map the earth. On a “land mine”, you’re in the world of detective-fiction, *film noir*: you don’t have the luxury

of looking around you and looking ahead, you have to keep looking at exactly where you are — one look to the side or to the front takes your mind off the earth at your feet, one look away and the earth takes over, the ground comes up from under you and blows you up off the ground.

10

In a long shot, in a panorama, land is “landscape”. Close-up, land is either quicksand or hard rock. Either it sucks you in, or it resists you and keeps you out. As you move through the park, inch by inch, each particle of grass or dirt is so soft it becomes a swamp; the earth quakes, the land splits and spirals downward, off the horizontal and into the vertical, underground. As you move down the street, inch by inch, each particle of sidewalk is so hard it becomes a reflective surface; buildings, that should have been at your side, are mirrored under your feet — the buildings fold and sandwich you inside. In a close-up world, there’s no distance that allows you to draw back and look; in a close-up world, things blur out of focus and can’t be named. To the body without eyes, the body without language, the land close-up becomes sea (since the grass and dirt are soft, you might as well dig through — sooner or later, water will seep through). To the body without eyes, the body without language, the land close-up becomes sky (since the concrete and asphalt are hard, and you can’t break through, all you can do is rub it, polish it, until it reflects the clouds).

11

To get past notions of “landscape”, go, literally, past the land, and down to the mines below the earth. The landscape is grounded on the pits and excavations below. Landscape architecture might be re-defined as architecture in and under and through the land. Landscape architecture is the architecture that escapes

the land, that hides and goes underground; if building on top of the land is addition (the act of adding structures to the land), then building under the land is subtraction (the act of taking land away, so that structures can be fit inside the land; the land is analyzed — separated into bits). Landscape architecture is the architecture of basements; the building of a base — slippage occurs from the base to basic instincts, and baser desires. As a land mine, the land can be considered as an excavation, a hole, a cavern; or the land itself can be picked up, like a bomb, like a land mine, and exported elsewhere — a plot of land can be attached onto a building, like a leech (the leech will grow), or inserted into a building, and through a building, like a cancer (the cancer will grow).

12

A view *of* the landscape can be replaced by a view *to* the landscape, and *through* the landscape. The landscape, instead of being an object for the eyes, becomes an object for the body; instead of being an object of sight, it's an object of touch — an object of the body's insertion into the landscape. Instead of being the passive receiver of sight, the landscape becomes the active agent of motion: the landscape moves as it's subjected to motion, as it's moved into and moved through. The landscape rises and falls; it can be considered as a series of horizontal planes, parallel horizontal planes going from below ground to above ground. These parallel horizontal planes are the infrastructure of behavior; they cut through the body as the body cuts through them. The body drifts through parallel planes of landscape, while parallel planes of landscape are driven through the body.

Public space is made and not born. What's called "public space" in a city is produced by a government agency (in the form of a park) or by a private corporation (in the form of a *plaza* in front of an office building, or an atrium inside the building). What's produced is a "product": it's bartered, by the corporation, in exchange for air rights, for the rights to build their building higher — it's granted, by the government agency, to people as a public benefit, as part of a welfare system. What's produced is a "production": a spectacle that glorifies the corporation or the state, or the two working together (the two having worked together in the back room, behind the scenes, with compromises and pay-offs). the space, then, is *loaned* to the public, *bestowed* on the public — the people considered as an organized community, members of the state, potential consumers. Public space is a contract: between big and small, parent and child, institution and individual. The agreement is that public space belongs to them, and they in turn belong to the state.

\*

Milling in the crowd, lost in the crowd, are the "others" — the outsiders, the people who have broken the contract, the people who don't have a home here. Public space does not belong to them. They can be tourists, transients, scouts; but they can never be inhabitants. For them, public space has to be taken. Public space is not a contract but a strategy. Public space is a discovery: the site is found, and explored — the flag is planted — the property is requisitioned. Public space is re-made, in their own image.

\*

*But, if we take the space, we can only hold it for a while, until the police come. We'll have made our point, but we don't have a program. So we draw back: read — learn — calculate — simplify — complicate...*

\*



Read the words "public space" literally, doggedly, dumbly. A space is "public" when: 1) its forms are public, its forms are publicly usable — they can be sat on, walked over, crawled under, run through, sprawled across, lived in; 2) its meanings are public, its meanings are publicly accessible — the place is made up of conventions, images, signs, objects, that everyone in a particular culture knows automatically, knows by heart; 3) its effect is public, its effects are publicly instrumental — the place shapes both the public that uses it and the public agency that organizes it. This third term thickens the plot. A space is public when it either maintains the public order, or changes the public order. A space is public, on the one hand, when it functions as a public prison: its conventions, images, signs, objects become facts of life — they make a system of order in which everything is in its proper place, and the citizens follow suit. A space is public, on the other hand, when it functions as a public forum: its conventions, images, signs, objects are turned upside-down, or collided one with the other, or broken into bits, so that those conventions are de-stabilized (they're not solid facts anymore) and the power that grounds each convention is exposed (the space becomes an occasion for discussion, which might become an argument, which might become a revolution).

\*

A public space, on a city plan, is an in-between place, or an out-of-the-way place. It exists as a transition between home and work-place, or it exists on the margins of either home or work-place. The public space is between, or to the side of, the intimacy of home and the aggression of work — between "love" at home and "war" outside the home, at work. Through the medium of a public space, a person is transported out of the home and out of the work-place, and inserted

into city-space. A public space is a civic space, and a civilized place: within its boundaries is a world of civility, manners, and codes. Each person, having a right to be there, has the responsibility to respect other people's rights. No person owns a place within the public space; each place changes hands: now it's occupied by one person, now by another. Each person has the right to a particular place, but only so long as he/she stays there, in place, only so long as he/she keeps his/her place (obeys the rules of the public space); when that person moves on (or when that person is moved off, by the authorities), another person can move right in. One person after another "rents" the space, each person has the rights of a tenant; for the time being, each person has his/her own rightful place, in the middle of the public space and contiguous to every other person's rightful place. This kind of public space is a conglomerate of private spaces, private (temporary) residences. The terms of the tenancy are: you can keep your place, as long as you keep to your place. If you move away from it, you can't move your place with you, as you move toward and into the place of another: you've lost your place, and the rights to that place, and you don't gain the rights to the other person's place. You can (if the other person lets you) encounter the other person, and share the place, but you can't *have* the place (the exact spot the other person occupies): you can't move the other person's body out of the way, nor can your body blend with that body — you can, for example (if the other person lets you) touch, or kiss, or hug, but you'd better not fuck (at least not where others can see you). You have a place here, within the public space, the way you have a parking space; you enter another person's place the way you enter the vestibule of a home; the public space is pre-space — an occasion for introductions, temptations, making plans for the future (the real

mix of privacies has to take place later, elsewhere, in "your place or mine").

\*

*Keep telling yourself: it's only a dream... it's only a novel... it's only a movie... it's only a video game... Keep telling yourself: it can't happen here, this is a public space...*

\*

A public space is occupied by private bodies. These private bodies have hidden feelings, and private lives, and secret dreams. Underneath the manners, underneath the civilities, underneath the appearances, underneath the clothes, is a seething mass of anger and desire. The terrain of a public space is a plane, a platform, that supports bodies: the terrain might have walls, either physical or metaphorical — it functions as a container of bodies. But the platform quakes, the container trembles at the boiling point. The wonder of the city is: with all these bodies crowded next to each other, one on top of the other — why aren't they all tearing each other's clothes off, why aren't they all fucking each other, left and right (and up and down, and in and out, and back and forth...)? The wonder of the city is: with all these bodies blocking each other, standing in each other's way, why aren't they all tearing each other apart limb from limb, and wolfing each other down? Public space is the last gasp of the civilized world; public space is the Great White Hope; public Space is belief and religion; public space is wishful thinking.

\*

A public space is not a space in itself but the representation of space. A public space is a game-board for mating games and war games. A bench, at the edge of a promenade, is a simulation of spying; face-to-face seats, across a table, simulate oral sex;

a running track, or a playground, is a simulation of fascist body-cults; a meandering pathway simulates getting lost, and disappearing — simulated suicide; trees and bushes simulate a hiding-place for crime; a playing field is simulated war; a pond, a fountain, simulate cleansing after a body battle, or a sweaty fuck. Public space is the domestication of war and sex.

\*

From an aerial view, the public spaces of a city appear as holes, within the density of buildings. It's as if land-mines have been planted, throughout the city; buildings have been exploded, here and there, to make way for public spaces. In the midst of a city of walls, a public space is an open space. You can drift and meander here, but only so long as you stay within the boundaries of the public space; when you cross over those boundaries, you're caught up in the routes and circulation systems and directions of the city. Within the bounds of the public space, you can walk as long as you want, but you end up walking in circles; this open space is a closed system. A public space is an exposed space; as in a small town, everyone knows what everyone else is doing. There are places to run, but no place to hide. In the midst of a city of roofs, a public space is an open space, it's open to view. From an aerial view, a public space is the city's playpen, the city zoo, where the inmates are empowered to go where and when and how they choose — because, all the while, they can be watched.

\*

*Birds; pigeons. Airplanes; helicopters. The birds and airplanes pass over the public space, they disappear off into the distance, with the promise that there's a world out there; meanwhile, the pigeons and the helicopters have swooped down, they're hovering over your heads.*

\*

Public space is a publicity system. The space functions, first, as advertising for itself: it draws the public to itself, by means of a visible sign, or a rumor spread through the public, or a memory kept in one private mind after the other — at the same time, perversely, it has to keep at least some of the public away, it has to put some of the public off, so that it can be read from a distance as a “public space”. Inside, the public space advertises its sponsor: it promulgates the message and values of the civic or corporate institution that built it, or of the revolutionary group that’s taken it over. The city gets, or makes, the kind of public space it deserves: the structure and forms of the public space advertise the city’s biases — stability or change, single-mindedness or multiplicity, old or young, power-culture or minority cultures, male or female.

\*

A space that’s usable by people becomes, in the end, used, and used up. The ultimate public space is a ravaged space: the space has been used so much by people that the space is used up, it disintegrates under their feet. The public space is purified now, it’s made up of nothing but bodies: the bodies are floating on air... there are so many bodies that the air is squeezed out... the people give each other mouth-to-mouth resuscitation...

\*

*“I wasn’t myself”. “Who were you then? Who are you now? Where are you? When are who you might be? What are you anyway?”*

\*

The body is public when it crosses the boundary of the body. The public body crosses genders and mixes races; the public body is neither one nor the other, neither here nor there — it’s all bodies at once. The body

made public is the body that keeps making itself public: it grows, out of itself, another body, which in turn grows another body, which grows another body, etc. The root of the word “public” — the Latin *publicus* — is influenced by the Latin *puber*, *pubes*: grown up, adult, puberty. “Public”, with just one letter missing (the letter of the law), becomes “pubic” (the spirit of the law). Public space is construction, an addition to public space; pubic space is de-construction, a subtraction from public space. “Public” contains “pubic”: the public body carries the pubic body within itself — the pubic body resides, like an alien presence, inside the public body. “Pubic” is extended to “public”: the pubic body is latched on to, by the public body — the public body clings to the pubic body, like a leech. The pubic body, adding to itself to become the public body, “comes out” and will never be himself/herself again; the public body, subtracting from itself to become the pubic body, is a man/woman without a country, and can’t go home again. The body drifts into space; space drives the body out of the body.

\*

The “space” of public space can itself be made public — not to function *for* a public but to be public (open, common, out of itself) in itself. A space is made public when it gives up being *made*, and lets itself go. A space begins to go public when it goes out of itself, separates from itself: the space splits and splinters, and rips itself to shreds and rips itself asunder. A unified public space is broken up into multiple, local public spaces. But these spaces remain physical; this act of making public is only a rehearsal for a non-physical public-making. The space drifts off into space, into its connotation of outer space. A space goes public when it continues to go until it disappears into the public: the space dissolves into neurons and waves and particles. The space becomes a network of parallel

spaces — physical space, projective space, topological space — that mix into one intertwined space transmitted through telephone, television, computer. A public space now, in the world of flesh and blood, is only a dream: the dream of its own dissolution. The goal of public space is to dissolve into the nerves of the public; the goal of public space is for space and public to be one and the same.

\*

If the dissolution of public space is in the future, the dissolution of public art is here and now. Public art is neither a thing nor a space nor a time. Public art should neither be seen nor heard. Public art has no place in public space; if you know you're in public art, then you're only in a museum that's been transposed outdoors. Public art gives way to public space and stays behind the scenes; public art is not a substance but a shadow — it throws its shadow — public art is the instrument that produces a public space. The "art" in public art is not an object but "the power of performing certain actions; skill; dexterity" (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, p. 122). The "art" of public art takes pride in its connotations of guile, cunning, trickery. The function of public art is to make or break a public space. On the one hand, it hunts down public spaces, it finds them where none existed before, in the nooks and crannies of privacy (in between buildings, under buildings, at the edge of buildings); the act of public art annexes territories, into the public realm. On the other hand, it loses public spaces; it takes a space that's ordained to be public — an institutionalized public space — and comes up from under it: the act of public art disintegrates the public space, so that the public can take it with them, on their backs or in their nerves.

BIOGRAPHY  
BIBLIOGRAPHY





## BIOGRAPHY

VITO ACCONCI

### 1940

Born in Bronx, NY  
Lives and works in Brooklyn, NY

### Selected Solo Exhibitions

#### 1969

Rhode Island School of Design,  
Providence, NY

#### 1970

Gain Ground Gallery, New York, NY  
Nova Scotia Gallery of Art and Design,  
Halifax, CDN  
Wabash Transit Gallery, Art Institute of  
Chicago, Illinois, IL

#### 1971

A Space, Toronto, CDN  
John Gibson Gallery, New York, NY  
New York University, New York, NY  
93 Grand Street, New York, NY  
112 Greene Street, New York, NY  
Protetch-Rivkin Gallery, Washington  
D.C., WA  
Rhode Island School of Design,  
Providence, NY

#### 1972

California Institute of the Arts,  
Valencia, CA  
Galerie Sonnabend, Paris, F  
Galleria l'Attico, Rome, I  
Sonnabend Gallery, New York, NY

#### 1973

Festival d'Automne, Paris, F  
Galerie D, Brussels, B  
Galleria Schema, Florence, I  
Modern Art Agencies, Naples, I  
Sonnabend Gallery, New York, NY

#### 1974

Galleria Alessandra Castelli, Milan, I  
Galleria Forma, Genova, I  
112 Greene Street, New York, NY

#### 1975

And/Or Gallery, Seattle, WA  
Carp Gallery, Los Angeles, CA  
Hallwalls, Buffalo, New York, NY  
James Mayor Gallery, London, GB  
Museum of Conceptual Art, San  
Francisco, CA  
Portland Center for the Visual Arts,  
Oregon, MI  
Sonnabend Gallery, New York, NY

#### 1976

Anthology Film Archives, New York, NY  
Artists Space, New York, NY  
Franklin Furnace, New York, NY  
Sonnabend Gallery, New York, NY  
Wright State University Art Gallery,  
Dayton, OH  
University of California Los Angeles,  
Los Angeles, CA

#### 1977

Anthology Film Archives, New York, NY  
Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva, CH  
Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels, B  
Galerie Stampa, Basel, CH  
Gallery of Fine Art, Ohio State  
University, Columbus, OH  
Modern Art Agency, Naples, I  
The Clocktower, Institute for Art and  
Urban Resources, New York, NY  
The Kitchen, New York, NY  
University of Massachusetts,  
Amherst, MA

#### 1978

Galerie Nachst Ste. Stephan, Vienna, A  
Galleria Mario Diacono, Bologna, I

International Cultureel Centrum (ICC),  
Antwerp, B

Minneapolis College of Art and Design,  
Minneapolis, MN

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art,  
San Francisco, CA

Studio Ala, Milan, I

The Kitchen, New York, NY

*Vito Acconci, Cultural Space Pieces  
1974-1978*, Kunstmuseum Luzern,  
Lucerne, CH

*Vito Acconci: Headlines and Images*,  
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, NL

Whitney Museum of American Art, New  
York, NY

#### 1979

Centre d'Arts Plastiques Contemporains  
(CAPC), Bordeaux, F  
De Appel, Amsterdam, NL  
Galerie Sonnabend, Paris, F  
Sonnabend Gallery, New York, NY  
Main Gallery, University of Rhode  
Island, Kingston, NY  
Young Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, IL

#### 1980

Center for the Arts, Muhlenberg  
College, Allentown, PA  
Atlanta Art Workers Coalition,  
Georgia, GA  
Museum of Contemporary Art,  
Chicago, IL  
The Kitchen, New York, NY

#### 1981

Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, D;  
Kunsthaus Zürich, Zurich, CH  
Max Protetch Gallery, New York, NY  
Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea,  
Milan, I  
The Kitchen, New York, NY  
University of California Los Angeles,  
Los Angeles, CA  
Young Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, IL

**1982**

Institute of Contemporary Art at the  
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts,  
Richmond, VI

Portland Center for the Visual Arts,  
Portland, MI

San Diego State University,  
San Diego, CA

University Gallery of Massachusetts,  
Amherst, MA

**1983**

Miami-Dade Community College, Miami, FL

Whitney Museum of American Art,  
New York, NY

Williams College Museum of Art,  
Williamstown, MA

**1984**

Nature Morte Gallery, New York, NY

University of Nebraska, Omaha, NB

Zone Center for the Arts, Springfield, MA

**1985**

Ackland Art Museum, University of  
North Carolina, NC

Carpenter + Hochman Gallery,  
New York, NY

City Hall Park, New York, NY

Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, IL

The Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY

Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT

**1986**

Kent State University School of Art  
Gallery, Kent, OH

The Palladium, New York, NY

USF Art Galleries, University of South  
Florida, Tampa, FL

Spirit Square Art Center, Charlotte, NC

Zone Center for the Arts, New York, NY

**1987**

*Vito Acconci: Domestic Trappings*,  
La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art,  
La Jolla, CA; Neuberger Museum of Art,

New York, NY; Aspen Art Museum,  
Aspen, CO; Laumeier Sculpture Park,  
St. Louis, MO

International Center of Photography,  
New York, NY

International with Monument,  
New York, NY

**1988**

*Vito Acconci: Photoworks, Videos et  
Films Super 8, 1969-1972*, Sous-Sol,  
Geneva, CH

Galleria Il Ponte, Rome, I

*Vito Acconci: Installations, Working,  
Drawings and Models*, B.R. Kornblatt  
Gallery, Washington D.C., NY

*Vito Acconci: Public Places*, The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY

Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, IL

*Vito Acconci: Photographic Works 1969-  
1970*, Brooke Alexander Gallery, New  
York, NY

*Face of the Earth*, Long Island  
University Public Art Program, New  
York, NY

**1989**

Barbara Gladstone Gallery,  
New York, NY

Mai 36 Galerie, Lucerne, CH

Sonnabend Gallery, New York, NY

Gray Art Gallery, Jenkins Fine Arts  
Center, East Carolina, EC

*Vito Acconci: Models for Public Projects*,  
University of North Carolina,  
Greenville, NC

**1990**

James Corcoran Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

*Vito Acconci: A Graphic Retrospective*,  
Landfall Press, New York, NY

**1991**

Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York, NY

Magasin, Centre National d'Art  
Contemporain, Grenoble, F

Galerie Anne de Villepoix, Paris, F

**1992**

Museo Luigi Pecci, Prato, I

**1993**

Barbara Gladstone Gallery,  
New York, NY

Stroom, The Hague, NL

Österreichisches Museum für  
Angewandte Kunst, Vienna, A

303 Gallery, New York, NY

Galerie Anne de Villepoix, Paris, F

Galerie Monika Sprüth, Cologne, D

**1994**

Le Consortium, Centre d'Art  
Contemporain, Dijon, F

University of Missouri - Kansas City  
Gallery of Art, Kansas City, MO

*Vito Acconci: A Graphic Retrospective*,  
Musée d'Art Moderne, Saint-Etienne, F

**1995**

Dia Center for the Arts/BAM Visual Arts  
Initiative, New York, NY

Theater Project for a Rock Band (In  
collaboration with The Mekons), New  
York, NY

**1996**

Galerie Monika Sprüth, Cologne, D

*Living off the Museum*, Centro Galego  
de Arte Contemporânea, Santiago de  
Compostela, E

*Public Spaces*, Klosterfelde Gallery,  
Berlin, D

**1997**

Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo, J

*Park in the Water*, Laakhaven, NL

*Acconci: Old, Refreshed & Re-viewed*,  
Videotapes & Films-on-video (1969-  
1976), Stroom, The Hague, NL

**1998**

Barbara Gladstone Gallery,  
New York, NY

## Selected Group Exhibitions

### 1968

*Tiny Events*, Longview Country Club, New York, NY

*Poetry Events*, Central Park, New York, NY

*Language Events*, Orient Expresso Coffee House, New York, NY

### 1969

*Street Works I-IV*, New York, NY

St. Mark's Church, New York, NY

*Photo Show*, SUB Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, CDN

*Performance*, The Unit Playhouse, Hunter College, New York, NY

*Language III*, Dwan Gallery, New York, NY

Gain Ground Gallery, New York, NY

557,087, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA

Emanu-el Midtown YM-YWHA, New York, NY

*Coulisse*, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, NY

*Arakawa/Aconci/Perreault/Venet*, The Theater, New York, NY

*Aleph 70*, New York University, New York, NY

### 1970

Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT

Tyler College of Art, Philadelphia, PA

*The Saturday Afternoon Show*, Max's Kansas City, New York, NY

*Software*, The Jewish Museum, New York, NY

*Recorded Activities*, Moore College of Art, Philadelphia, PA

*Perreault/Aconci*, St. Mark's Church, New York, NY

995,000, Vancouver Art Gallery, British Columbia, CDN

*Information*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

*Four Theater Pieces*, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT

*Events*, Grammercy Arts Theater, New York, NY

*Body Works*, Museum of Conceptual Art, San Francisco, CA

*Art in the Mind*, Allen Art Museum, Oberlin, OH

*Aleph 71*, New York University, New York, NY

### 1971

Wisconsin State University, Whitewater, WI

University of Rhode Island, Kingston, New York, NY

*The Boardwalk Show*, Protetch-Rivkin Gallery, Convention Hall, Atlantic City, NJ

*Sonsbeek 71*, Arnhem, NL

*Prospect*, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf, G

*Projects: Pier 18*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

*Projected Art*, Finch College, New York, NY

Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, G

*Lithographs: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design*, The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, CDN

Daniel Templon, Paris, F

Cheltenham Art Center, Philadelphia, PA

*Body*, New York University, New York, NY

*Body Art*, John Gibson Gallery, New York, NY

*Biennale des Jeunes*, Paris, F

*Artists' Videotapes*, Finch College, New York, NY

*Arte de Sistemas*, Museo de Arte Moderno, Buenos Aires, RA

*Aconci/Fox/Oppenheim*, Reese Palley Gallery, New York, NY

### 1972

*Toeval*, Universiteitsmuseum, Utrecht, NL

*Sum*, Galerie Sum, Reykjavik, IS

*Performance Spaces*, School of Visual Arts, New York, NY

*Notes and Scores for Sounds*, Mills College, Oakland, CA

*Making Megalopolis Matter*, New York Cultural Center, New York, NY

*420 West Broadway at Spoleto Festival*, San Nicolo, Spoleto, I

*Encuentros*, Museo de Navarra, Pamplona, E

*Documenta 5*, Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, G

### 1973

*Some Recent American Art*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

*Galleria Contemporanea*, Rome, I

*Aspects de l'Art Actuel*, Musee Galliera, Paris, F

*American Drawings 1963-1973*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

### 1974

*Video Tapes*, Kolnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, G

*71st American Exhibition*, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL

*Kunst Bleibt Kunst: Projekt 74*, Kunsthalle Köln, Cologne, G

*Idea and Image in Recent Art*, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL

*Eight Contemporary Artists*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

*Art Now '74*, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington D.C., NY

*Americans in Florence: Europeans on Florence*, Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA

### 1975

*Video Art USA*, XIIIe São Paulo Biennial, São Paulo, BR

*Video Art*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

*Video Art*, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

*Lives*, The Fine Arts Building, New York, NY

*Language and Structure in North America*, Kensington Art Association, Toronto, CDN

*Bodyworks*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL

*Autogeography*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

#### 1976

*Video Art: An Overview*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA

*Bienale di Venezia*, Venice, I

*The Artist and The Photograph*, Second Triennial of Photography, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, IL

*Style and Process*, The Fine Arts Building, New York, NY

*72nd American Exhibition*, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL

*Rooms*, P.S. 1, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, New York, NY

*Private Notations: Artists' Sketchbooks II*, Philadelphia College of Art, Philadelphia, PA

*In Transit*, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA

*Identite/Identifications*, Centre d'Arts Plastiques Contemporains (CAPC), Bordeaux, F

*A Patriotic Show*, Lerner-Heller Gallery, New York, NY

*Style and Process*, The Fine Arts Building, New York, NY

#### 1977

*Words*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

*View of a Decade*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL

*Time*, Philadelphia College of Art, Philadelphia, PA

*Three Installations*, Sonnabend Gallery, New York, NY

*16 Days*, Corps de Garde, Gronigen, NL

*1977 Biennial Exhibition*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

*Landfall Press: A Survey of Prints 1970-1977*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL

*In Video*, Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia, CDN

*Installation and Print Projects by Visiting Artists at Wright State University 1974-1977*, Fine Arts Gallery, Wright State University, Dayton, OH

*Improbable Furniture*, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

*Documenta 6*, Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, G

*Collection in Progress: Selections from the Collection of Milton Brutten and Helen Herrick*, Moore College of Art, Philadelphia, PA

*American Art in Belgian Collections*, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, B

*Acconci/Jonas: Video Installations*, School of Visual Arts Gallery, New York, NY

#### 1978

*Works from the Collection of Dorothy and Herbert Vogel*, University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, MI

*Video Art*, Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA

*Bienale di Venezia*, Venice, I

*Three Installations*, Tampa Bay Arts Center, Tampa, FL

*The Sense of the Self: From Self-Portrait to Autobiography*, Neuberger Museum, State University of New York, New York, NY

*Policeband Cancelled*, Corps de Garde, Gronigen, NL

*Performance Art Festival*, Cultureel Animatie Centrum Beursschouburg, Brussels, B

*Made by Sculptors*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, NL

*Journées Interdisciplinaires sur l'Art Corporel et les Performances*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, F

*Artwords and Bookworks*, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA

*Artists' Books*, Zona, Florence, I

#### 1979

*Words*, Museum Bochum, Bochum, G

*12 Films Chosen by Artists*, De Appel, Amsterdam, NL

*The International Strike of Artists?*, Museum fur (Sub)Kultur, Berlin, G

*The Artist: Hermit? Investigator? Social Worker?*, Hamburger Kunstverein, Hamburg, G

*Sound*, P.S. 1, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, New York, NY

*Kunstlerbucher*, Galerie Lydia Megert, Bern, CH

*Forum Audio Visuel*, Sichtung Forum, Middleburg, NL

*Concept/Narrative/Document: Recent Photographic Works from the Morton Neuman Family Collection*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL

*Ateliers Aujourd'hui: Oeuvres Contemporaines des Collections Nationales Ancre III*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, F

*A Great Big Drawing Show*, P.S. 1, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, New York, NY

#### 1980

*Walls*, Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH

*Painting & Sculpture Today - 1980*, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, Indiana

*Morris, Acconci, Oppenheim*, Sonnabend Gallery, New York, NY

*Hier et Apres/Yesterday and After*, The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, CDN

*56 Artistes + 1*, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva, CH

*Festival of Two Worlds*, San Nicolo, Spoleto, I

*Bienale di Venezia*, Venice, I



*Drawings: The Pluralist Decade*,  
Institute of Contemporary Art,  
Philadelphia, PA

*Dal Corpo al Nuovi*  
*Media, Film/Performance*, Palazzo Reale,  
Tetro del Falcone, Genova, I

*Biennale van de Kriek*, International  
Cultureel Centrum, Antwerp, B

*A Sound Selection: Audio Works by*  
*Artists*, Artists Space, New York, NY

*Art of Conscience: The Last Decade*,  
Fine Arts Gallery, Wright State  
University, Dayton, OH

*Artist and Printer*, Walker Art Center,  
Minneapolis, MN

*The Sense of the Self*, Independant  
Curators Incorporated, New York, NY

#### 1981

*1981 Biennial Exhibition*, Whitney  
Museum of American Art, New York, NY

*Westkunst: Zeitgenossische Kunst Seit*  
*1939*, Museen der Stadt Koln, Cologne, G

*Video Classics*, Bronx Museum of Arts,  
New York, NY

*Variants: Drawings by Contemporary*  
*Sculptors*, Sewall Art Gallery, Rice  
University, Houston, NY

*The Prison Show: Realities and*  
*Representations* Whitney Museum of  
American Art, New York, NY

*The Kitchen Benefit Exhibition*, Paula  
Cooper Gallery, New York, NY

*Soundings*, Neuberger Museum, State  
University of New York, New York, NY

*Selections from the Chase Manhattan*  
*Bank Collection*, University Gallery,  
University of Massachusetts,  
Amherst, MA

*Radio by Artists*, A Space, Toronto, CDN

*Projects at the Precinct*, Creative Time,  
New York, NY

*Other Realities: Installations for*  
*Performance*, Contemporary Arts  
Museum, Houston, TE

*Metaphor: New Projects by*  
*Contemporary Sculptors*, Hirshorn  
Museum and Sculpture Garden,  
Washington D.C., NY

*Manifestoes*, Lerner-Heller Gallery,  
New York, NY

*Machineworks: Vito Acconci, Alice*  
*Aycock, Dennis Oppenheim*, Institute of  
Contemporary Art, University of  
Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

*Italians and American Italians*, Crown  
Point Gallery, Oakland, CA

*Home Made Movies: 20 Years of*  
*American 8mm and Super-8 Films*,  
Anthology Film Archives, New York, NY

*Heart: A Collection of Artists' Books for*  
*Libraries, Museums and Collectors*,  
Printed Matter, New York, NY

*Films by American Artists: One Medium*  
*Among Many*, Arts Council of Great  
Britain, London, GB

*Art in Pursuit of a Smile*, Muhlenberg  
College, Allentown, PA

*A Range of Contemporary Drawings*,  
Sordoni Art Gallery, Wickes College

*Alternatives in Retrospect*, The New  
Museum, New York, NY

*Instruction Drawings: The Gilbert and*  
*Lisa Silverman Collection*, The  
Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum,  
Cranbrook, New York, NY

*In and Out of Kutztown: A*  
*Documentation of the Art Series*  
*Program 1974-81*, Kutztown State  
College, Kutztown

#### 1982

*Documenta 7*, Museum Fridericianum,  
Kassel, G

*Tracking, Tracing, Marking, Pacing*  
*(Movement Drawings)*, Pratt Institute,  
Brooklyn, New York, NY

*'60-'80: Attitudes/Concepts/Images*,  
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, NL

*Record Covers for Show*, White Columns,  
New York, NY

*Post-Minimalism*, Aldrich Museum of  
Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT

*Photographs in Painting and Sculpture*,  
Daniel Wolf Inc., New York, NY

*Photographs by Artists*, Galerie France  
Morin, Montreal, CDN

*Painting and Sculpture*, Art Galleries,  
American Academy of Arts and Letters,  
New York, NY

*Octopus*, El Museo del Barrio,  
New York, NY

*New Directions: Contemporary Art from*  
*the Commodities Corporation Collection*  
Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, FL

*National Video Festival*, American Film  
Institute, Los Angeles, CA

*Il Pennello Improprio*, Giardini de  
Bellariva, Florence, I

*Illegal America*, Exit Art, New York, NY

*Painting, Drawing, Sculpture and Prints*,  
Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, NY

*Four Manifestos:*  
*Acconci/Barranik/Beuys/Mendieta*,  
Lerner-Heller Gallery, New York, NY

*Editions*, Gallery 'A', Amsterdam, NL

*Drawings, Models and Sculptures*,  
Fourteen Sculptors Gallery,  
New York, NY

*De la catastrophe*, Centre d'Art  
Contemporain, Geneva, CH

*Artists' Photographs*, Crown Point  
Gallery, Oakland, CA

*Art and Dance*, Institute of  
Contemporary Art, Boston, MA

*Anti-Apocalypse: Artists Respond to the*  
*Nuclear Peril*, William Patterson  
College, Wayne, NJ

*Androgyny in Art*, Emily Lowe Gallery,  
Hofstra University, Hempstead, New  
York, NY

*Metaphor: New Projects by*  
*Contemporary Sculptors*, Hirshorn  
Museum and Sculpture Garden,  
Washington D.C., NY

#### 1983

*When Words Become Works*, Minneapolis  
College of Art and Design,  
Minneapolis, MN

*Urban Site*, 80 Langton Street, San  
Francisco, CA

*Urban Pulses: The Artist and the City*,  
Pittsburgh Plan for Art, Pittsburgh, PA

*Sound/Art*, The Sculpture Center,  
New York, NY

*Preparing for War*, Brooklyn Army Terminal, New York, NY

1984, Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York, NY

*Minimalism to Expressionism*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY  
*Bridges*, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York, NY

*Art Video: Retrospectives et Perspectives*, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Charleroi, B

Artpark, Lewiston, New York, NY

*Art of Social Conscience*, Edith C. Blum Art Institute, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, NY

*Taitelija Video Tanaan/Artists' Video Today*, 192-97, Helsinki, SF

#### 1984

*Visions of Paradise: Vito Acconci/David Ireland/James Surls*, Hayden Gallery, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA

*The Xmas Tree Show*, BACA Downtown, New York, NY

*The Success of Failure*, Diane Brown Gallery, New York, NY

*The Skowhegan Celebration Exhibition*, Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York, NY

*Het Lumineuze Beeld/The Luminous Image*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, NL

*Staged/Stages*, Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, New York, NY

*Sound Art*, The Sculpture Center, New York, NY

*Soul Catchers*, Stellwig-Seguy Gallery, New York, NY

*Selections From the Permanent Collection*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL

*Projects: World's Fairs, Waterfronts, Parks, and Plazas*, Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, IL

*Outdoor Life*, The Red Studio, New York, NY

*International Sculptural Invitational: Time and Space*, Visual Arts Center of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska

*Hungry for Words*, Gallery 345, New York, NY

*Furniture, Furnishings: Subject and Object*, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, NY

*Etchings and Woodblocks*, Pace Editions, New York, NY

*Ecritures dans la Peinture*, Villa Arson, Nice, F

*Drawings by Sculptors: Two Decades of Non-Objective Art in the Seagram Collection*, The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, CDN

*Crown Point Pure Silk*, I. Magnin, San Francisco, CA

*Content: A Contemporary Focus, 1974-1984*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., NY

*Baubles*, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York, NY

*Artists' Weapons: Peace and Good Will to all Men*, Ted Greenwald Gallery, New York, NY

*Armed*, Interim Art, London, GB

*The Last 80 Langton Street Catalog*, New Langton Arts, San Francisco, CA

*1984 Visual Arts Program*, Artpark, Lewiston, NY

#### 1985

*V<sup>ente</sup> Biennale Internationale de Sculpture en Plein Air*, Skironio Museum Polychronopoulos, Athens, GR

*Urban Artworks*, Public Art Space, Seattle, WA

*37th Annual Purchase Exhibition*, American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York, NY

*The Maximal Implications of the Minimal Line*, Edith C. Blum Art Institute, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, NY

*The Doll Show: Artists' Dolls and Figurines*, Hillwood Art Gallery, C.W. Post Campus, Long Island University, Greenvale, New York, NY

*The Bronx Celebrates*, Lehman College Art Gallery, City University of New York, Bronx, NY

*Ten: The First Decade*, University Art Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA

*State of the Art*, Twining Gallery, New York, NY

*Promenades*, Parc Lullin, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva, CH

*Process und Konstruktion*, Künstlerwerkstätten, Munich, G

*Microcosms*, Maeght-Lelong Gallery, New York, NY

*Memory Jam: A Retrospective of Films and Performances at Artists Space 1974-1985*, Artists Space, New York, NY

*Making Shelter*, Graduate School of Architecture and Design, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

*Long Island Estate Gardens*, Hillwood Art Gallery, C.W. Post Campus, Long Island University, Greenvale, New York, NY

*Land/Space/Sculpture*, Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA

*In Addition: Other Works by Artpark's 1985 Project Artists*, Buscaglia-Castellani Gallery, Niagara University, Niagara Falls, New York, NY

*Houses*, Newhouse Gallery, Snug Harbor, New York, NY

*Four Legs - The Dog Show*, Art Gallery at Harbor Front, Toronto, CDN

*Festival 85: Art Now*, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC

*Contemporary Art Auction to Benefit El Bohio*, El Bohio, New York, NY

*Blossom Festival School Art Program*, The Gallery, New School of Art, Kent State University, OH

*Biennale des Friedens*, Hamburger Kunsthau und Kunstverein, Hamburg, G

*A Salute to the National Endowment for the Arts Twentieth Anniversary*, La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, CA

Artpark, Lewiston, New York, NY

*Artists and Architects: Challenges in Collaborations*, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, OH

*Art and Time*, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, B

*Arresting Images*, 10 on 8, New York, NY

*A New Belonging: 1968-1978*, The Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, New York, NY

*Adornments*, Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, New York, NY

## 1986

*Zugend auf eine Biennale des Friedens*, Hamburger Kunstverein und Kunsthhaus, Hamburg, D

*Wien Fluss*, The Vienna Festival, Vienna, A

*Vito Acconci/Nancy Dwyer/Matt Mullican*, 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*Two Moon July*, The Kitchen, New York, NY

*The Watermelon Show*, Gallery Hirondelle, New York, NY

*The Law and Order Show*, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York, NY

*The First Decade*, The Freedman Gallery, Albright College, Reading, PA

*The Fairy Tale: Politics, Desire and Everyday Life*, Artists Space, New York, NY

*The Doll Show*, Kilcawley Center Arts Gallery, Youngstown State University, OH

*Single Shots: A Video History of Personal Expression*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA

*Sculpture: Acconci/Sherman/Steinbach/Wentworth*, Carpenter-Hochman Gallery, New York, NY

*Public and Private: American Prints Today*, Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY

*Place*, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM

*Picture This: Films Chosen by Artists*, Hallwalls, Buffalo, New York, NY

*Opening Exhibition*, Socrates Sculpture Park, Long Island City, New York, NY

*1986: A Celebration of the Arts Apprenticeship Program*, City Gallery, New York, NY

*New York City Video*, Artspace, Visual Arts Center, Surry Hills, A

*Intimate/Intimate*, Turman Gallery, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana

*Engaging Objects*, The Clocktower, New York, NY

*Artists Support Black Liberation*, La Galleria en El Bohio, New York, NY

*Art in the Environment*, Boca Raton Museum of Art, FL

*Ars Electronica*, Studio Oberosterreich, Linz, A

*A.P.: Artists' Photographs*, Zona Archives, Florence, I

*An American Renaissance: Painting and Sculpture Since 1940*, Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, FL

*Real Time - Actual Space*, La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, CA

## 1987

*Prints in Parts*, Crown Point Press, New York, NY

*Perverted by language*, Hillwood Art Gallery, C.W. Post Campus, Long Island University, Greenvale, New York, NY

*Concrete Crisis: Urban Images of the 80's*, Exit Art, New York, NY

*Acconci/Brenner/Gayman/Younger*, American Fine Arts/ Collin De Land Fine Arts, New York, NY

*The Success of Failure*, Independent Curators Incorporated, New York, NY

## 1988

*Identity: Representations of the life*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

*International Landscape*, Galerie Christoph Durr, Munich, D

*The New Urban Landscape*, The World Financial Center, New York, NY

*The Debt*, Exit Art, New York, NY

*Sculpture at the Point*, Point State Park, Pittsburgh, PA

*Private Works for Public Spaces*, R.D. Erpf Gallery, New York, NY

## 1989

*Image World: Art and Media Culture*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

*The Experience of Landscape - Three Decades of Sculpture*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

*Immaterial Objects: Works from the Permanent Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art*, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, NC

*First Impressions: Early Prints by Forty-Six Contemporary Artists*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, NY

*Contemporary Art from New York - The Collection of the Chase Manhattan Bank*, Yokohama Museum of Art, Yokohama, J

*Une Autre Affaire*, Festival Nouvelles Scenes '89, Dijon, F

*China*, Asian American Arts Center, New York, NY

*Recent Acquisitions*, Collett Art Gallery, Weber State College, Ogden, Utah

*International Landscape*, XPO Galerie, Hamburg, D

*Taboo*, Greg Kucera Gallery, Seattle, WA

## 1990

*Word as Image: American Art 1960-1990*, Milwaukee Museum of Art, Milwaukee; Oklahoma City Arts Museum, Oklahoma; Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TE

*Casino Fantasma*, Casino Municipale di Venezia, Venice, I

*Conceptual Arts/Conceptual Forms*, Galerie 1900/2000, Paris, F

*Recent Print Acquisitions in Series*, Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston, IL

*Exposed*, Vivian Horan Fine Art, New York, NY

*Selected Prints and Multiples*, Mai 36 Galerie, Lucerne, CH

*Pharmacy*, Jan Kesner Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

*Assembled: Works of Art Using Photography as a Construction Element*, The University Art Galleries, Wright State University, Dayton, OH

*American Art Today: The City*, The Art Museum at Florida International University, FL

*Hand, Body, House*, Ben Shahn Galleries, William Paterson College of New Jersey, Wayne, NJ

*Concept Decoratif: Anti-Formalist Art of the 70's*, Nahan Contemporary, New York, NY

#### 1991

*1991 Biennial*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

*Power: Its Myths, Icons, and Structures in American Art, 1961-1991*, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis; Akron Museum of Art, Akron; Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond, VA

*Dissensi: Tra Film Video Televisione*, VI Rassegna Internazionale del Video d'Autore, Taormina, I

*Immaterial Objects*, Whitney Museum of American Art at Equitable Center, New York, NY

*The Fetish of Knowledge*, Real Art Ways, Hartford

*Departures: Photography 1923-1990*, Independent Curators Incorporated, New York, NY; Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Art Gallery, MA; Denver Art Museum, Denver; Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha; Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, Pittsburgh, PA; Goldie Paley Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

*43rd Annual Academy - Institute Purchase Program*, Telfair Academy, Savannah American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, New York, NY

*Devices*, Josh Baer Gallery, New York, NY

American Fine Arts, New York, NY

*True to Life*, 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*Telekinesis*, Mincher/Wilcox Gallery, San Francisco, CA

*Poets/Painters Collaborations*, Brooke Alexander Editions, New York, NY

*Video Library*, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, NY

#### 1992

*Allocations/Art for a Natural and Artificial Environment*, Floriade, Zoetermeer, NL

*The Power of the City/The City of Power*, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

*Functional Objects by Artists and Architects*, Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, IL

*Surveillance*, Nancy Drysdale Gallery, Washington DC, NY

*Still*, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, NY

*Animals*, Galerie Anne de Villepoix, Paris, F

*Habeas Corpus*, Stux Gallery, New York, NY

*Tattoo*, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, NY

*In Through the Out Door*, Nordanstad/Skarstedt Gallery, New York, NY

#### 1993

*5e Semaine Internationale de Video*, Saint-Gervais, Geneva, CH

*The Language of Art*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, A

*Contemporary Public Art in the Bronx*, Lehman College Art Gallery, New York, NY

*Action/Performance and the Photograph*, Turner/Krull Galleries, Los Angeles, CA

*Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue*, Fairfield University, Fairfield, CT

*45th Annual Academy Purchase Exhibition*, American Academy of Arts & Letters, New York, NY

*Tyne International 1993*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Newcastle, NY

*Photoplay: Works from the Chase Manhattan Collection*, Center for the Fine Arts, Miami, FL

*Abject Art - Repulsion and Desire in American Art*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

*Il Mondo del Corpo*, Studio Oggetto Milano, Milan, I

*Thresholds and Enclosures*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA

*Live in Your Head*, Hochschule für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna, A

*Art and Application*, Turbulence, New York, NY

#### 1994

*Hors Limites*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, F

Royal College of Art, London, GB

*The Ossuary*, Luhring Augustine, New York, NY

*The Old Glory*, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, Cleveland, NY

*Tradition and Invention - Contemporary Artists Interpret the Japanese Garden*, Sogetsu Plaza, Sogetsu Kaikan, J

*Outside the Frame*, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, Cleveland; Sung Harbor Cultural Center, Staten Island, New York, NY

#### 1995

*Biennale d'Art Contemporain de Lyon*, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon, Lyon, F

*Ripple Across the Water 95*, Watari-Um, Museum of Tokyo, Tokyo, J

*1965-1975: Reconsidering the Object of Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA

*Self Construction*, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna, A

*Artistes/Architectes*, Nouveau Musée/Institut d'art contemporain de Villeurbanne, Villeurbanne, F

*Les années 80-90*, Musée d'art moderne de Villeneuve d'Ascq, Villeneuve, F

*Landscape: A Concept*, California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, CA

*Collisions*, Artekelu, San Sebastian, E

*Sculpture as Objects: 1915-1995*, Curt Marcus, New York, NY

*Foundations: Underwear/Under Where?*,  
Lawrence Gallery, Rosemont, PA

*In a Different Light*, University Art  
Museum, Berkeley, CA

ARS 95 Helsinki, Museum of  
Contemporary Art, Helsinki, SF

#### 1996

*The Art Embodied*, Musée d'Art  
contemporain de Marseille, Marseille, F

Biennale di Firenze, Florence, I  
*A History of Technological Visions since  
the 18th Century*, Kunsthalle Wien,  
Vienna, A

*Sex & Crime. On Human Relationships*,  
Sprengel Museum, Hannover, D

*NowHere*, Louisiana Museum of Modern  
Art, Humlebaek, DK

*Skin Deep: Works on Image, Body &  
Text*, Mercer Union, Toronto, CDN

*Retinal Circus*, Art Space,  
Copenhagen, DK

*Self Constructio*, 20er Haus, Vienna, A

*Art Chicago 1996*, Rhona Hoffman  
Gallery, Chicago, IL

*Autoreverse 2*, Centre National d'art  
Contemporain de Grenoble, Grenoble, F

*Passion Privees*, Musée d'Art Moderne,  
Paris, F

*From Figure to Object*, Firth Street  
Gallery, London, GB

*a/drift*, Center for Curatorial Studies,  
Bard College, New York, NY

#### 1997

*Broken Home*, Greene Naftali Gallery,  
New York, NY

*In Site '97. New Projects in Public  
Spaces*, San Diego, Tijuana, NM

*The Private Eye in Public Art*,  
NationsBank Plaza, Charlotte, NC  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New  
York, NY

*Rooms with a View: Environments for  
Video*, Documenta X, Kassel, D

*Heaven*, P.S.1, New York, NY

*Kunst...Arbeit*, Südwest LB forum,  
Stuttgart, D

#### 1998

*Tracin'*, Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo, J

*Out of Actions: between performance  
and the object, 1949-1979*, Museum of  
Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA;  
Museu d'Art Contemporani de  
Barcelona, Barcelona, E

*Sculptors and Their Environments*, Pratt  
Institute, Pratt Manhattan Gallery,  
New York, NY

*Conceptual photography from the 60's  
and 70's*, David Zwirner Gallery, New  
York, NY

*Voices*, Witte de With, Rotterdam, NL;  
Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, E; Le  
Fresnoy, Studio national des arts  
contemporains, Tourcoing, F

#### Public Projects

Years refer to dates of completion

#### 1983

*Way Station #1 (Study Chamber)*,  
Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT

*Sub-Urb*, Art Park, Lewiston, NY  
(temporary)

*See-Saw Bridge*, Pratt University,  
Brooklyn, NY (temporary)

*House of Cars*, San Francisco, CA  
(temporary)

#### 1984

*Bad Dream House #1*, Massachussets  
Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA  
(temporary)

*Face of the Earth #1*, Springfield, IL  
(temporary)

#### 1985

*House of Used Parts*, Harvard  
University, Cambridge, MA (temporary)

*Bodies in the Park*, Parc Lullin, Geneva,  
CH (temporary)

#### 1986

*House in the Ground*, New Mexico State  
University, Las Cruces, NM

*Palladium Underground (Garden of  
Bodies)*, The Palladium, New York, NY

#### 1987

*Displaced Person*, La Jolla Museum of  
Contemporary Art, La Jolla, CA

*Garden of Columns (Town Square for  
Workers)*, Coca-Cola USA, Atlanta, GA

#### 1988

*Bad Dream House #2*, John Weiland  
Homes, Atlanta, GA

*House of Cars #2*, Govener State  
College, Chicago, IL

*Face of the Earth #2*, C.W. Post Center,  
Long Island University, Brookville, NY

*Face of the Earth #3*, Laumeier  
Sculpture Park, St. Louis, MO

*Birth of the Car/Birth of the Boat*, 3  
Rivers Festival, Pittsburgh, PA  
(temporary)

*Garden with Fountain*, World Financial  
Center, New York, NY (temporary)

#### 1989

*Floor Clock*, Chicago Dock&Canal,  
Chicago, IL

#### 1991

*Land of Boats*, St. Aubin Park,  
Detroit, MI

*Mobile Linear City*, (portable, various  
locations)

#### 1992

*Earth Wall*, Arvada Art Center for Arts  
and Humanities, Arvada, CO

#### 1993

*Renovation of Storefront for Art &  
Architecture*, New York, NY (with  
Steven Holl)

*Personal River*, Tyne, Newcastle, GB  
(temporary)

#### 1994

*Personal Island*, Zwolle, NL

*Bench/Bollard*, Tachikawa City, J

Ribbon Pavement/Bench for  
Embarcadero Promenade, San Francisco,  
CA (with Stanley Saitowitz & Barbara  
Stauffacher Solomon)

**1995**

Metrotech Center, Brooklyn, NY  
Klapper Hall, Queens College, New  
York, NY  
*Courtyard*, P.S. 3, Bronx, New York, NY

**1996**

*House up a building*, (portable, various  
locations)  
*Park up a building*, (portable, various  
locations)  
*High rise of trees*, Atlanta, GA  
*Loloma Station*, Scottsdale, AZ (with  
Douglas Snyder & Angela Dye)  
*Park in the water*, The Hague, NL

**1998**

*Indoor Park for Departures Terminal*,  
Philadelphia Airport, PA  
*Plaza and Lobby for Midwest Convention  
Center*, Milwaukee, W



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Selected Writings by the Artist

1965

"Blowstalk" [poem], *Lives*, November, 16

1966

"The Fakir Depends on a Page's Fragment", "Paying the Dilapidations of a Lease", "In the Spare Jade of a Boxing Match Aden Adau Considers the Theory of Rhyme", "Strangler's Interlude", "Spending the Plates", "Itinerary of an Abstinence" [poems], in "The Minor Grammars." Double Bubble. Co-authored by E. Lagomarsino

1967

"Kay Price and the Stella Pajunas" [poem], *O to 9*, April, pp. 12-20

"The Liquid Boxes of Agamemnon" [poem], *Art and Literature*, Winter, pp. 106-110

"Twelve Minutes" [poem], *O to 9*, August, pp. 49-57

1968

"First Printing" [poem], *Reindeer*. New York, unpag

"He-Had-Gone", "Staples", "Reading-Is-Getting", "First Glance", "Treed", "Reprinted from the Following Magazines" [poems], *O to 9*, June, pp. 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59

"On" [poem], *O to 9*, January, pp. 4, 11, 14, 24, 26, 31, 34, 48, 56, 63, 66, 68, 76, 78, 82

"Tic", "Re", "Kay Price and Stella Pajunas" [poems], in Paul Carroll (ed.): *The Young American Poets*, Big Table, Chicago, IL, pp. 15-30

"To Go On...", "On the One Hand...", "(He Moved Yesterday)...", "Let me Explain", "Once there was a Man..." [poems], *Extensions* 1, pp. 43-46

"Using a Trot", "The Red and the Yellow and the Blue Men" [poems], *The Paris Review*, Summer, p. 108

1969

"A Situation Using Streets, Walking, Running", "Four Situations Using Streets and Identification", "A Situation Using Streets, Labels, Buses", "A Situation Using Streets, a Clock, Darkness, Time Lag", "A Situation Using Streets, Walking, Glancing", in "Streetworks." *O to 9*. July Supplement, unpag

"Contacts/Contexts (Frame of Reference): Ten Pages of Reading Roget's Thesaurus (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965)" [poem]. *O to 9*. July, pp. 17-26

Edge, Edge In (Drop): Three Boundaries of One Page of Webster's Third New International Dictionary" [poem], *The 5*, unpag

"Four Pages", "Act 3 Scene 4" [poems], *O to 9*, January, pp. 32-35, 65-70

"He was Small...", "Read this Word...", "It is the Day Inasmuch...", "They are United..." [poems], *Extensions* 2, pp. 5, 71, 94

"Performance Situation: Sending Out/Sending", [notes], *Dramatika*, Fall.

*Transference: Roget's Thesaurus*. *O to 9* Books, New York

1970

"A Situation Using Hannah Wiener's 'Open House' (Streetworks IV)" [notes], *Juilliard*. Summer, unpag

"A Situation Using Tape, Voice, Description", "A Situation Using Shift, a Performer, an Observer" [notes], *Extensions* 4, pp. 44-45

"Notebook Excerpts", *Assembling*, New York, NY

"Ply" [poem], *Extensions* 5-6, pp. 22-23

"Rubbing Piece", "Overtaking Piece", "Learning Piece", "Room Piece" [notes], *L'Humidite*, December, unpag

"Some Notes on Activity and Performance", John Gibson Commissions, New York

"Some Notes on Activity and Performance", "Rubbing Piece", "Following Piece", "Room Piece", "Hand and Mouth Piece" [notes], *Interfunktionen*. November, pp. 138-42

1971

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